

THE GOLDEN AGE OF
**COMIC
FANDOM**



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KEVIN HORN

THE FANZINES! THE DEALERS! THE COMICONS!
THE BOOK-LENGTH HISTORY OF COMIC FANDOM'S
EARLY YEARS...NOW REVISED AND EXPANDED!

ing Funny In Vintage Books' Prices
 Comics Craze Comeback



Early Comic Book Issues Bring High Prices as Collectors' Items

BY PETER JOHNSON
 Times Staff Writer

BY RICK CARROLL
 News Staff Writer

zens of sprawling metropolises of a curious mania is possessing your fellow man.

It's a renaissance of old-time any books and if you held on to your childhood collection, well — SHAZAM, baby — you could be in the chips.

For old comics are selling faster than a speeding bullet at prices higher than the tall buildings Superman could leap in a single bound.

So claims 24-year-old Frank Scadina, owner-operator of San Jose's first and only comic book clearing house, reputed to be the largest between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

"Comics are in big demand," Scadina says with a smile that tells you he saved his.

Four months ago with so pals he opened a cubby-shop at 40 E. San Fernando with an inventory exceeding 10,000 issues.

He added up \$700 in sales, thought out his talking at a book

First editions of nearly any are most sought after with mint condition copies going for \$200 or more.

Many later issues in good to mint shape also command top dollar prices. The first issue of "Mad," printed in 1932, already is a collector's item. It sells for \$10.

For as little as a few the old but appeal in

Old Comic Books Sell 6 for \$40

Flash Gordon A Collector's Item

By VICTOR DEPICCIOTTO
 Staff Writer

My parents never wanted me to read comic books. They questioned their value to my

heros on the screen (Larry "Buster" Crabbe as Flash Gordon).

Kenneth has more than 1,000 comic books at his home at 334 Marvin Ave. and several collections of strips carefully cut from daily and Sunday comic sections.

sional publications of the trade.

As a member of the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Art Collectors, Kenneth receives the group's newsletter, "On the Drawing Board," and attends its annual conventions.

This summer's convention in New York City, he disclosed, will consider, among other things, raising money for a comic art museum.

For Kenneth and his companion collectors in Bergen County and the region, a day off from school is a day to visit with artists and writers in New York at the various comic publishing houses.



He Wants To Write

What about the future? "Well I don't have any talent for drawing," Kenneth readily admitted, "but I have written a story which is even now awaiting publication. I think I'd like to go into the writing end of the business."

High Prices Paid for Ancient Comic Books

By CLARK KENT
 as told to DAVID LEWIN

SHAZAM! And no one knows what it means. No one that is except a few hard core comic collectors.

Why during the 40's every kid worth his weight in anything knew that SHAZAM was the magic word that turned Billy Batson into Captain Marvel, The Worlds Mightiest Mortal.

Captain Marvel --another forgotten time Captain

people plead nostalgia when buying Others say they buy for investment purposes (comic books have gone recei caus terpi

An reasc ents Gord igns.

Bu strip

After the war, comic books sank, and many publishers remedy the situation w

Newsweek

February 15, 1965

LIFE AND LEISURE

Superfans and Batmaniacs

Funnier than Heien Gurley Brown! More improbable than "Goldfinger"! Able to draw 1,000 times its original price! Is it a bird? A plane? No—it's the June 1938 issue of Action Comics, which introduced the immortal Superman to of American folk idols and \$100 collector's first-

Aquaman. Hawkman, the tern, the Green Arrow, Doctor Fate, the Shield, man. The movement has that last year Jerry Bails, associate professor of nat Wayne State University's lege in Detroit founded named Academy of Co and Collectors (members Others, notably pop Lichtenstein and Mel back to the strips for



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Batman Escapes From Old Trunk

THE GOLDEN AGE OF
COMIC
FANDOM

by Bill Schelly



HAMSTER PRESS
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

**This book is a "time machine" ...
and you are about to take an
amazing journey.**

The Golden Age of Comics had ended, and the wild and wonderful world of EC had come and gone, too. But with the onset of the Second Heroic Age, a new breed of comic book fans arose. And those fans had a dream.

A dream of a "fandom" they could call their own. A place where fans of comic art – especially the costumed characters who were enjoying a renaissance – could share their hobby with others of like mind.

As the new fan movement grew, the hobby of comic book collecting came into its own. A flurry of fanzines criss-crossed the country and circled the globe, bringing articles, artwork and ads to a diverse and multi-talented audience of eager readers.

It was a remarkable time. Excitement was in the air. Every trip to the mail box brought palpitations, for who knew what wonders awaited?

Frontispiece: "Getting Mail" by Mike Vosburg, 1995



Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to Jerry Bails, Roy Thomas and Ronn Foss, for their extensive contributions (both in terms of time and materials) to the manuscript. I am also very grateful to Michael T. Gilbert for the new cover, Mike Vosburg for his wonderful frontispiece, and John Benson, who added a lot to the coverage of EC fandom. Also I must thank Jim Steranko and David Spurlock for giving me permission and providing me the materials and background information to include *The Convenienceers* in this book.

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For their inspiration and support, I'd also like to thank Dave Schelly (my brother), Jo Schelly (my mom), and Bud Plant for giving me the "nudge" to tackle this revised edition.

Dedication

To Jaimeson and Tara Jane

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An Introduction by Roy Thomas

I never thought of it as a "Golden Age" while it was happening. But I suppose it was.

Just as, on a vaster scale, the original "Golden Age" of classical mythology was the first of the Four Ages of Man, an era of peace and harmony which yielded, in turn, to a lesser Silver Age.

Just as the "Golden Age of Comic Strips" seems to be the 1930s, or at least that decade plus the years immediately before and after it.

Just as the "Golden Age of Comic Books" is generally held to last from 1938, when Superman picked up his first flivver, through the late 40s or at most the mid-50s, when super heroes were dying like flies and self-appointed censors were abroad in the land, hot on the trail of Charles Biro and Bill Gaines.

If there was indeed a "Golden Age of Comic Fandom" (or "Comics Fandom," take your pick), it surely began in the early 1960s with Jerry Bails' *Alter-Ego* and Don and Maggie Thompson's *Comic Art*, midwived by Dick and Pat Lupoff's *Xero*.

And, though by the end of the decade I wasn't paying much attention, I certainly wouldn't quarrel with Bill Schelly's thesis (if I read it a-right) that comic fandom was in its prime in the 1960s, though it continued along in diminished form in the ensuing years.

But I'll let Bill argue and augment such points. He does it superbly, mixing factoids and anecdotes together like a human blender, and basically doing for comic fandom what Sam Moskowitz did for science fiction fandom more than forty years ago, in his book *The Immortal Storm*, which dealt with sf fandom's first decade, the 1930s.

Oddly enough, the cast of characters of the two books (and the two fandoms) overlaps to some extent, with sf fans and pros like Julius Schwartz, Otto Binder, Mort Weisinger, and a couple of others prominent in both eras, three decades apart.

For me, it was pretty much all comic books.

Oh, I was a nigh-charter member of the Science Fiction Book Club in the mid-50s, a reader of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* starting with #1 in 1958, a fantasy movie buff ever since I first saw "Tarzan's Desert Mystery" at the age of four, and an early fan of comic strips such as Alley Oop, Pogo, King Aroo. But it was comic books, another discovery I made more or less on my own at age four, which always had the strongest grip on me.

All the same, I do grow a bit embarrassed when, from time to time, I'm given credit orally or in writing for co-

The

Altered

Ego

No. **7**

Alter Ego

Featuring:
**COMIC HEROES OF
THE PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE!**



The **SAGA**
OF THE
MARVEL FAMILY

Above: Alter Ego #7 (October 1964) featured "On Man's Family," Roy Thomas' lengthy article on Captain Marvel and his namesakes. Biljo White, who created this classic cover, acted as Art Editor for AE #7 - 9. (Reproduced from the original art.)

founding comic fandom in the early 60s.

That is an honor which belongs, above all others, to Dr. Jerry Bails of Detroit, Michigan, as Bill Schelly artfully explains, amid deferential nods to the Lupoffs, the Thompsons, and one or two of their intellectual forebears.

Me? I was just a cheerleader—a chief-cook-and-bottle-washer—Robin to Jerry's Batman—Tonto (albeit a far more garrulous one) to his Lone Ranger.

I just wasn't driven enough or organized enough (or, being a college student at the time, financially solvent enough) to have played any part in the founding of a comics fandom, if it hadn't been for Jerry Bails, and, to a lesser extent, the example of the Lupoffs and the Thompsons.

Jerry, Don and Maggie Thompson, and me each received a "Lifetime Fandom Award" in 1990. I said in my short acceptance speech that I didn't belong in the first tier of comics fandom as the other three did. And I meant it. I feel if I hadn't been the first full-fledged member of comic fandom to make the jump to prodom in the 60s (and even then, you've got to discount demi-fan Nelson Bridwell and earlier EC fan Archie Goodwin), so that I became briefly Mort Weisinger's assistant on *Superman*, then Stan Lee's protégé and eventual successor at Marvel both as writer of major comics and as editor in chief, I'd have been rightfully relegated to far fewer paragraphs in the opus you hold in your hands.

The *second* tier, now? Well, maybe. Hey, I'm not that modest. But I'll let you make up your own mind about that, after reading Bill's excellent book.

Myself, I'll just wallow for a moment more in the vivid memories which were stirred to life within me as I provided bits and pieces of information and opinion for Bill, both for this

book and for one or two of his previous ones.

Some, perhaps all, of the names and events that I'm going to hit you with now will be unfamiliar to you until you've read this book, but I'm going to toss them around anyway.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, and not more than three decades ago:

The thrill of waking up one 1960 morning to tear into the morning mail—my first letter from Jerry Bails, accompanied by semi-complete copies of *All-Star* #4 - 6, then and now my favorite comic book title;

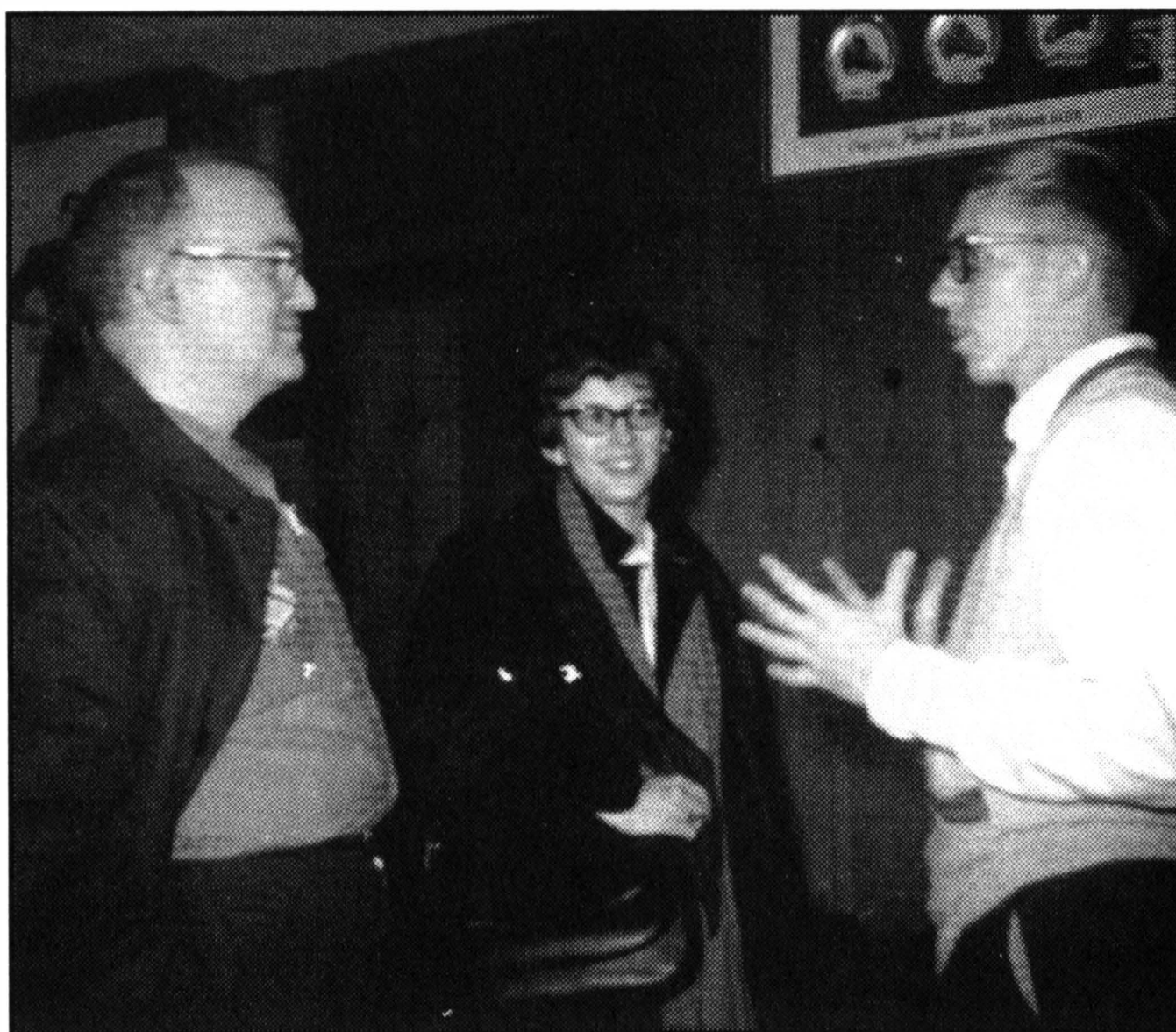
The ecstasy of reading the first three issues of *Xero* all at one sitting, when Jerry mailed me the copies Julius Schwartz had loaned him—and which made me realize that Jerry and I were not alone;

The early excitement of corresponding with Big Name Fans like Dick Lupoff, Don and Maggie Thompson, Ted White, Richard Kyle, and others, even if I thought one or two of them a bit overly condescending in their attitudes toward the super hero comics I loved;

The White House of Comics, that little concrete-block of a building out behind Biljo White's home in Columbia, Missouri, where "the cap'n" kept huge Golden Age collections of comics featuring Superman, Batman, Blackhawk, Captain Marvel, and so many, many more—it was like Oz, Wonderland, and a Spanish galleon all rolled up into one, and I wish to God I could go back there for just one long languid afternoon;

Those little caricatures Ronn Foss used to draw of himself and sprinkle in his letters—always showing him with a pipe, and looking so cool, collected, and sophisticated that it was hard for me to remember that he was, at most, a year or so older than I was;

Fellow Missourian Steve Gerber, a decade before Howard the Duck, sending me whole comics he'd hand-drawn of his own Legion-of-Super-Heroes-influenced creations, illustrated in semi-stick-figures on paper about as durable as Bounty paper towels, but alive with his youthful enthusiasm (after all, he was just a kid—in junior high, while I was finishing up college);



Roy Thomas met Don and Maggie Thompson for the first time in December 1964 at a fan-meet in Chicago. The Adventures of Captain Marvel serial never arrived, but everyone had a fine time anyway.

Cajoling my longtime girlfriend (later a college professor in the field of literature) into posing for me in mask, cape and tights as "Joy Holiday"—small wonder we drifted apart a little later, huh?;

That first wonderful meeting of Jerry, Biljo, and me (with our respective ladies) at the White homestead, which seems to me comparable to the "Las Vegas Summit" of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. occurring around the same time;

My trip over Thanksgiving 1963 to visit Jerry and Sondra Bails in Detroit, a memory made forever bittersweet by the fact that it happened the week after the assassination of President Kennedy, and it was hard to turn on a TV set without becoming depressed;

Seeing "The Bestest League meets Da Frantic Four" take shape via the mails, as Grass Green sent me pages whereon he'd drawn his Marvelesque

heroes into panels where I'd already drawn the BLA, and made the whole thing work;

Reading *Justice League of America* #16, which featured an off-stage character named "Jerry Thomas" after JGB and me (at the time I figured that was the closest I'd ever get to being in the comics industry);

My elation at seeing *Alter Ego* #7, the first issue I edited and published, come rolling off the presses, with Biljo's fabulous cover, the original of which I wouldn't part with for the world;

My long drive in my '56 Chevy amid melting snow over Christmas 1964 from southeastern Missouri to Chicago for my first comics confab, where I met Don Glut and the Thompsons;

That July 4th weekend in '65, when Dick and Pat Lupoff were kind enough to invite a lonely Missourian, who'd just moved to New York City and knew few people there, up to



PHOTO BY ROY THOMAS

Above: Linda Rahm as the lovely fandom mascot Joy Holiday, ca. 1964



Above: Superham joins the BLA in *Alter Ego* #5 (March 1963).

their place in Poughkeepsie—and gifted me with a spare set of bound editions of *Xero* and *Comic Art*, which I still treasure;

The excitement of my first New York con, put together so ably by Dave Kaler (my roommate at the time), and my sensation during it that I was awkwardly straddling the worlds of fandom and prodrom (since I'd only gone to work in comics a couple of weeks before);

Sitting on a panel at that con between Jim Warren and Gil Kane, with *Creepy's* publisher putting an imaginary knife in my back when I made some fannish comment he didn't like;

My fascination that same day as Bill Finger, a writer who used cinematic jargon, told how one comic artist once drew an inexplicable, out-of-nowhere archer atop a roof in one

panel—and how, when asked by the editor what he was doing there, the artist replied, "Well, the script said, 'Shoot from the roof.'";

Watching the fireworks fly a year or so later when, at John Benson's con, the Comics Code administrator had the temerity to suggest in front of Ted White and Don Thompson that Bill Gaines should thank the Code for driving him out of the comics business, since *Mad* magazine eventually made him rich.

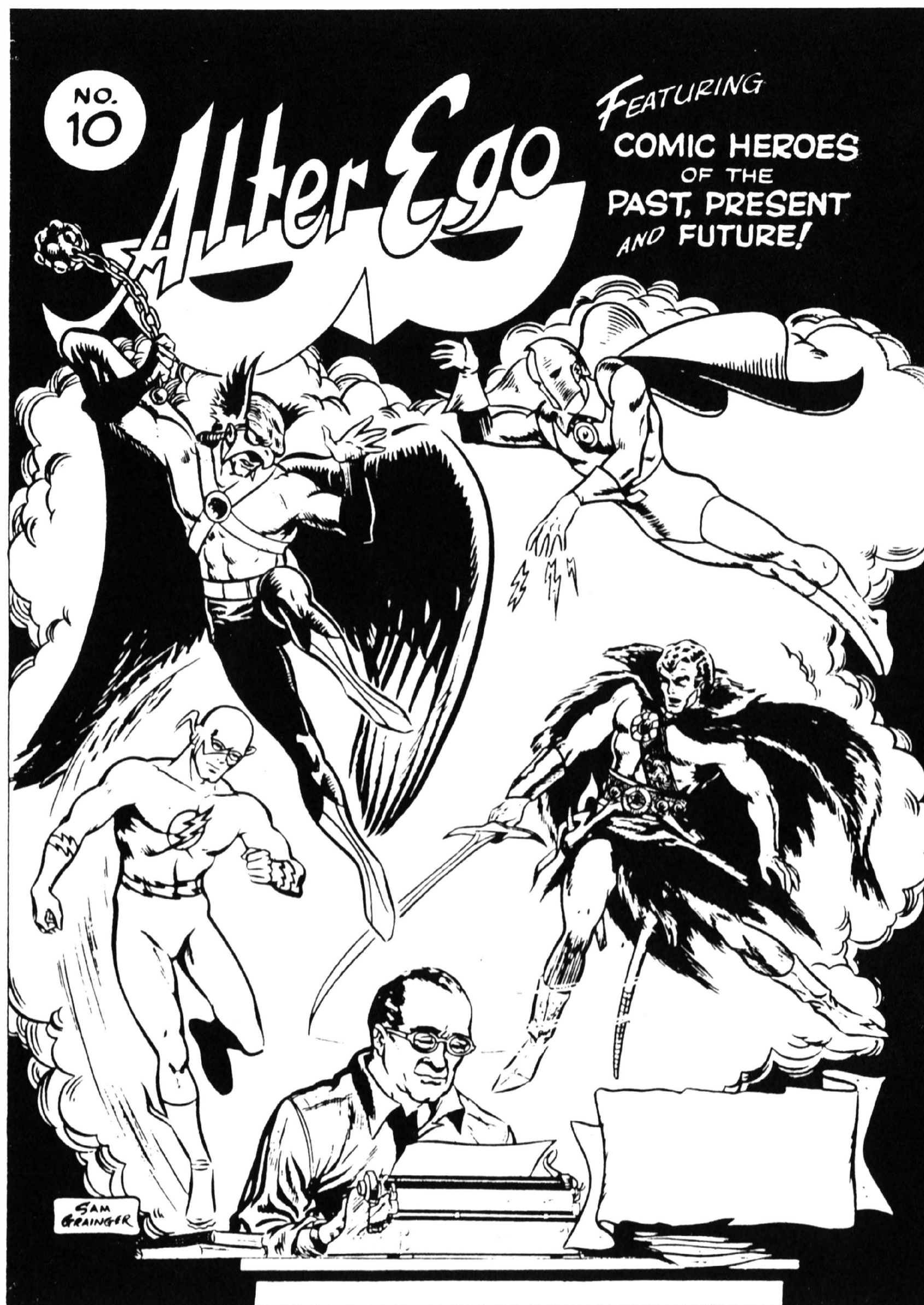
And yes, I could go on and on—but I won't.

Better you should read Bill Schelly's book, so I'll step aside—well, after I make two more points, anyway.

First: Neither Bill in the book proper, nor I here, make any strong, impassioned plea about how "important" the subject matter is. After all, the "importance" of comics fandom—or of comic books themselves, for that matter, to anyone except their creators and the companies' stockholders—is in the mind's eye of the beholder. It seems to me that the history of any creative endeavor ought to be of some importance and interest to those who are intrigued by the subject matter.

Second: Stop and think, from time to time as you read this book, how difficult it must have been to write—not so much the actual writing, but gathering all the information that's included in these pages, and tracking down so many fanzines, so many people, from an era when few people thought either the zines or the memories were particularly worth saving.

After all, the early fanzines were published in print runs that measured in the low hundreds, and sometimes less than that. Even those who originally published the zines don't always have copies of them. (For instance, I know I have my original copies of *Alter-Ego* #1 - 3 around somewhere, because I saw them a couple of



The proposed cover for Alter Ego #10 by Sam Grainger, for an issue to be devoted to the creations of Gardner F. Fox. Had it been used, the Silver Age Flash would have been re-drawn as the Jay Garrick version.

years ago—but I'll be damned if I could locate them when Bill asked to borrow them so that he could trace the covers I drew for #1 and 2!)

The people, too, are long scattered to the winds. It's hard for me to think of Phil Seuling (a dear friend and a dear, dear man beneath his brusque exterior), Don Thompson, and several others as being forever lost to us. And over the years, though Jerry Bails and I have always kept in communication with each other,

I regret to say I lost touch with the likes of Ronn Foss, Biljo White, Grass Green, Dave Kaler.

I'd like to think it's not too late to rekindle those friendships, so we can get together and hoist a glass or two to those long-ago days, to use the phrase Biljo once wrote on a photo of the two of us, "when it was all a lot more fun."

Roy

The Golden Age

Cover by Michael T. Gilbert

Featuring some of the most memorable characters of the amateur comic book scene of the 1960s, infused with a nostalgic golden glow: Dr. Weird, Adam Link, Misbourne, The Eclipse, The Eye, The Human Cat and Joy Holiday.

Frontispiece by Mike Vosburg 3

In a time long before the Internet, postal deliveries were the only way most fans had to communicate with kindred spirits in far flung locations.

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Comics fans have been around as long as comic books have existed. A certain number of science fiction fanzines carried comic book news. In the 1950s, EC comics inspired the first attempt at a semi-organized fandom for those who appreciated comic books.

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A science professor from Michigan named Jerry G. Bails, Ph.D. originates the most influential comics fanzine of the 1960s, with a timely assist from Roy Thomas. DC editor Julius Schwartz plays a key role.

Ch. 3 - Out of the Woodwork 36

With the publication of *Alter-Ego*, other resourceful comics fans formed the nucleus of comic fandom. *AE* subdivides to form the first ad-zine and news-zine, *The Comickollector* and *The Comic Reader*. G. B. Love launches *The Rocket's Blast*.

Ch. 4 - Advent of the Amateur Comic Strip ..45

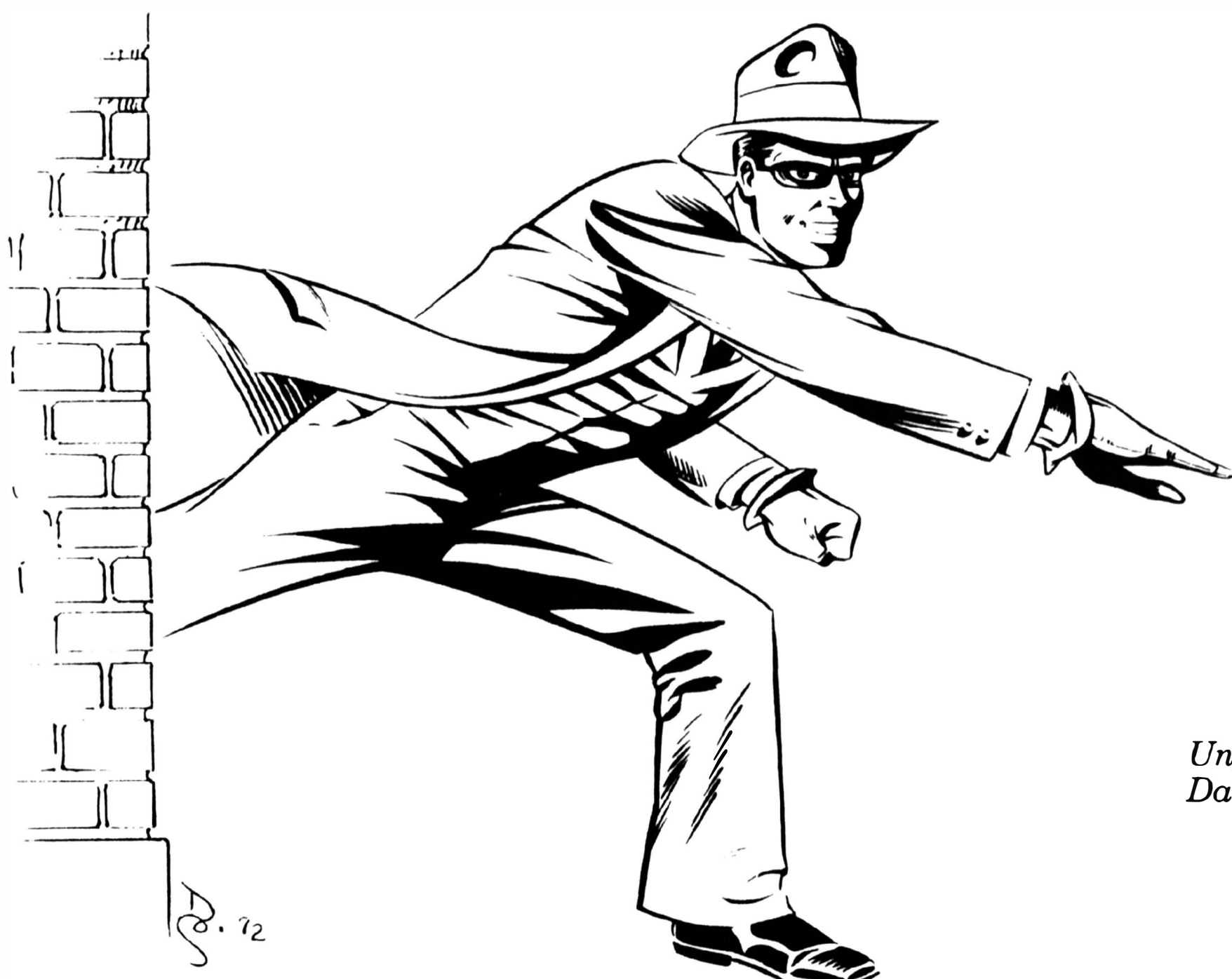
Numerous talented writers and artists began created original comic strips for a growing number of fanzines. Popular amateur super heroes The Eclipse, Dr. Weird and The Eye are introduced. The 1962 World Science Fiction convention masquerade featured a Justice Society of America contingent. The Alley Awards for 1961 are announced.

Ch. 5 - The Academy and *RB-CC* 64

An attempt is made to organize the members of fandom into the Academy of Comic-Book Arts and Science. *The Rocket's Blast* and *The Comickollector* merge.

Ch. 6 - The First Comic Book Conventions .. 71

The Alley Tally Party is the first sizable gathering of comics fans. A 1964 Detroit mini-con is followed by the first New York Comicon, which had three representatives from Marvel in attendance. Almost 30 fans show up for a post-Christmas gathering in Chicago.



Unpublished illustration by
Dave Stevens from 1972

of Comic Fandom

Ch. 7 - 1965: A Watershed Year 82

Comic fandom becomes a self-sustaining movement. Marvel provides key support in the *FF* letter column. Roy Thomas turns pro. The 1965 New York Comicon draws almost 200 fans. Newspapers and magazines "discover" comicdom, focusing on the substantial sums that vintage comic books are commanding. Bookstores specializing in old comics emerge.

Ch. 8 - Fanzine Mania 98

A fanzine explosion occurs in the mid-1960s, with the advent of influential fanzines such as *Comic World*, *Yancy Street Journal* and *Batmania*. *RB-CC* goes photo-offset. *Star-Studded Comics*, *Fantasy Illustrated* and *Alter Ego* reach their potential. Ditto and mimeo fanzines proliferate.

Ch. 9 - Regional Fan Scenes.....116

Certain areas of the country lead the way in the growth of fandom, in the form of comic book clubs and comicons. Particular hotbeds of fan activity in Oklahoma/Texas, Chicago, California and New York/New England are especially active.

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Gradually an elevated level of discourse about the potential of the newly-named "graphic story medium" emerges. The amateur strip fanzines begin bolder experiments. Phil Seuling assumes chairmanship of the annual New York Comicon, which becomes larger and more elaborate in 1968.

Ch. 11 - Coming of the Pro-Zines.....137

A new kind of professional, or semi-professional, magazine called *Witzend* begins a trend toward slicker publications aimed specifically at comic fandom. The quotient of professional art used in fanzines increases. High quality reprint books become more common. "Fannishness" is lost. A number of fan artists break into pro comics in the early 1970s.

Ch. 12 - Brave New Comicdom 143

In 1970, Bob Overstreet's first *Comic Book Price Guide* appeared, providing the first comprehensive index of all comic books, and creating considerable controversy among dealers and fans alike. The San Diego Comicon is born, as is *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom*. A new generation of active fans comes to the forefront as many of the old guard aflate. By 1972, comic fandom had changed considerably in terms of both its size and its focus.

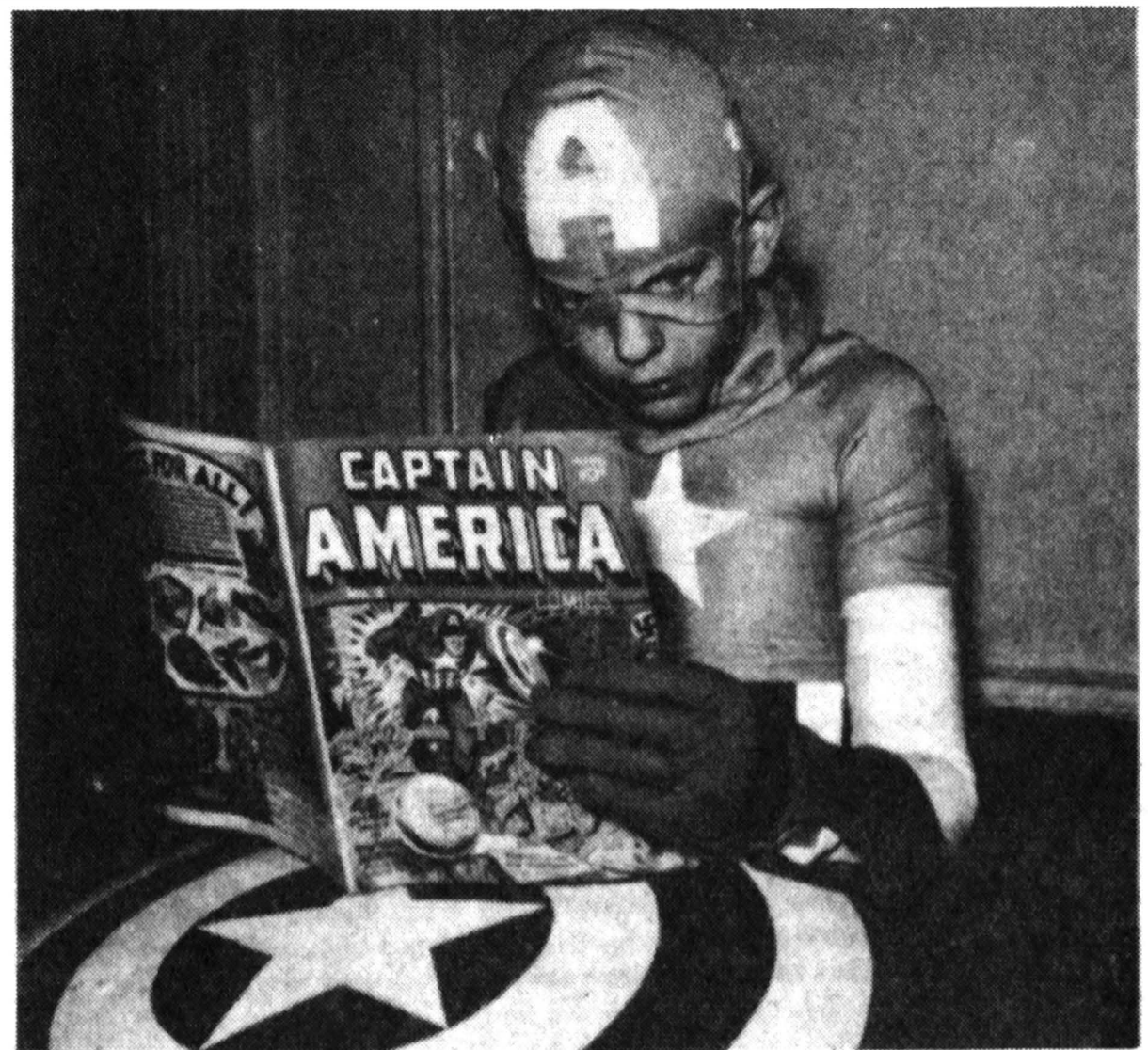


PHOTO BY LARRY IVIE

Above: Dave Armstrong at an early New York Comicon.

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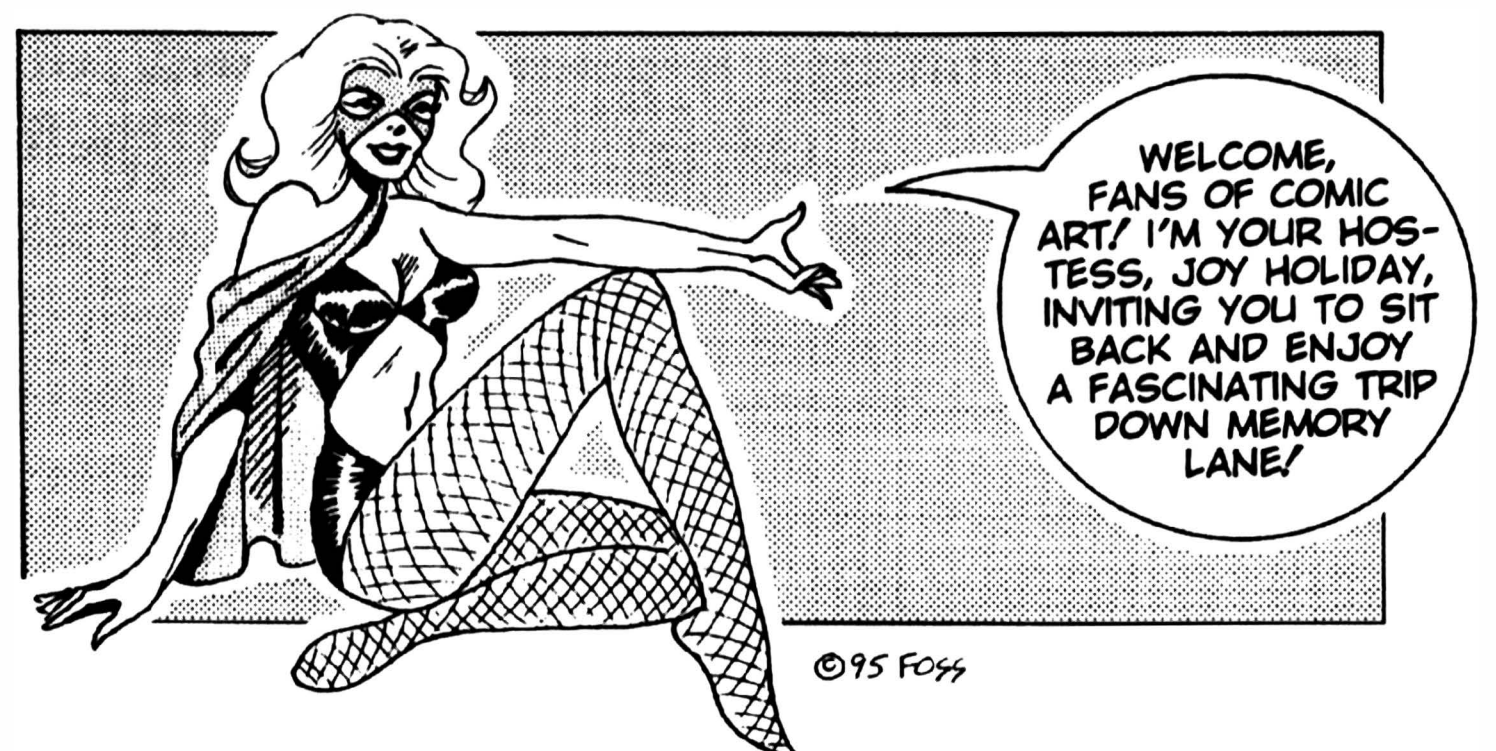
The comic fandom movement had a far-reaching effect on the comics industry. Many of fandom's founders have passed away, but others have gone on in some surprising directions.

Special Report: Fandom Reunion 1997.....163

Thirty-three old-time fans reunited during the Chicago comicon, including many meeting longtime correspondents and collaborators for the first time.

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1

Before the Golden Age

There was no comic fandom in the 1940s. But science fiction fanzines reported a certain amount of news about fantasy-related comics.

Sam Moskowitz

Confronted with the spectacle of throngs of comic fans at the major comicons of the 1990s, it is almost inconceivable that there could have been a time when there was no comic fandom.

Yet, when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was sworn into the Presidency in January 1961, comicdom as we know it didn't exist. There were no comicons ... no comic specialty stores ... no trade publications ... no price guides. There was no special place for the comic art collector and fan to link up with others of like mind. Comic book collecting was, for most, a solitary pursuit.

Today, fans worry about having too many titles featuring certain heroes, the strategies of the huge corporations who own the major comics publishers, and the industry's ongoing boom-and-bust cycles. In 1961, the questions were far more basic: "How do I find

someone with whom I can share my hobby?" "How long have comic books been published?" "What were they like in the past?" "Where do I find back issues?" "Are my comics worth saving, or should I throw them away when I'm done with them?"

There were no easy answers, until a group of energetic, talented, even visionary souls scattered across the United States made up their minds to bring collectors together to answer those questions. They dared to dream that, some day, comic art might be a respected part of the American cultural scene.

Not that there weren't fans of comic art before 1961—there were many. After all, the late 1930s and early 1940s were the heyday of the Golden Age of Comics, a time when colorful costumed heroes led the young comic book medium to phenomenal sales that have, overall, never been matched

in ensuing years. But in order for fans to come together to form a *fandom*, the first prerequisite was a central meeting place. No such rallying point exclusively for comic fans emerged during the first great decade of the comic book. The only thing that came *close* were the science fiction fanzines of the era.

Science fiction (sf) fandom coalesced when Hugo Gernsback, publisher of *Amazing Stories* (the first magazine in history to be devoted entirely to sf), ran a letter column called "Discussions" which included complete addresses of the letter writers. Fans began making connections, forming fan clubs, and publishing amateur fan magazines. Sf fandom was born.

The first fanzine of this fledgling movement (though the term "fanzine" wouldn't be coined for several years) was *The Comet* (1930), followed by *The Time Traveller* (1932). Though officially

FANTASY WORLD

" CARTOONS OF IMAGINATION "


THE FANTASY WORLD

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Assistant
Harold Tunick

DAVID A. KYLE
Editor-in-chief

Helping
D. Pelton-J. Fox



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AN APOLOGY -	

This issue was the first undertaking of this staff. We tried to the best of your ability to make this a worthy magazine. The present issue was entirely hand printed! We have had many errors; however, we have greatly profited. The next issue will have many improvements. First, Pure WHITE PAPER! Second, Booklet form (Like the Literary Digest) and Machine Print!!



Two pages from Fantasy World #1, subtitled "Cartoons of Imagination," published by David A. Kyle. FW is the first known publication devoted to comic art, including amateur comic strips.

edited by Allen Glasser, TTT was mainly the brainchild of Julius Schwartz and Mortimer Weisinger. (The first issue included a contribution by Forrest J. Ackerman.) It was listed as "Science Fiction's Only Fan Magazine," and consisted of news of sf fans, authors, editors and magazines.

Also in 1932, Jerome Siegel and Joseph Shuster published *Science Fiction*, a mimeographed periodical which lasted five issues, featuring mainly sf text stories with occasional illustrations.

As early as February 1936, a mimeographed fanzine devoted entirely to comics was published by prominent sf fan, artist and photographer David A. Kyle. *Fantasy World* featured original sf-themed comic strips by Kyle, whose early art was crude yet gave evidence of nascent talent. With subsequent issues the title was modified to *Phantasy World*. By

the third issue (dated April 1937), the contents included not only the nicely-drawn "One Mercutian Night" strip, but a story by Eando Binder titled "The Sign of the Scarlet Cross," with illustrations by Kyle.

Phantasy World did not contain articles about comics, or super-heroes—which, in any case, *hadn't made it into the new comic book medium yet*. (Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* was a year away.) Still, there is no doubt that Kyle's humble publication qualifies as the first known amateur magazine devoted to comics.

Sam Moskowitz, one of the most active sf fans (and author of *The Immortal Storm*, the history of sf fandom's first decade) was quick to point out, "There was no comic fandom in the 1940s. But science fiction fanzines reported a certain amount of news about fantasy-related comic books."

James V. ("Jimmy") Taurasi of Flushing, New York, was one of the first to prominently feature comic book news in an sf fanzine. His *Fantasy News* and *Fantasy Times* ran headlines announcing the latest developments in the world of comic books, such as DC's suit against Victor Fox for copyright infringement (Superman vs. Wonder Man), and Otto Binder's decision to write full-time for Fawcett Publications' comic magazines. A 1939 issue of *Fantasy News* announced the coming of Centaur's *Amazing Man Comics* before the comic book hit the newsstands.

This scoop by Taurasi was noted in "Looking Over Your Magazines," a fanzine review column which debuted in Centaur's *Amazing Mystery Funnies* #16 (December 1939). Could this have been comics' first fan-oriented feature? *AMF* #16 appeared one month after *Marvel Comics* #1.

LOOKING OVER YOUR MAGAZINES

*A New Department For Boys and Girls
Who Publish Their Own Magazines*

Why This Page—

One day, your Uncle Joe received in the mail a small magazine that had been entirely written and drawn, and reproduced by one of his nephews. Uncle Joe received several more, all of them very interesting. As a result, he wrote an editorial complimenting the young editors and publishers . . .

As soon as all of Uncle Joe's readers read that editorial, more and more of these clever little newspapers and magazines written by nieces and nephews began coming in to him. Your Uncle Joe had no idea that you were so much interested in the publishing hobby!

Uncle Joe then decided to start a department to list and review your fan magazines. He asked a young fellow by the name of John Giunta, himself famous as the publisher of his own mimeographed magazines, to write these reviews. I hope you'll like the idea!

Now for the REVIEW!

By John Giunta

Well keds! Here is a new department interest to you. I will review the amateur fan magazines printed by you, whether it is printed, mimeographed, or hecktographed. I am sure this department will go over with a bang!

Now to start reviewing:

Here is one from near the World's Fair! (I wonder if he knows The FANTOM OF THE FAIR?) FANTASY NEWS Weekly: published by James V. Taurasi at Flushing, Long Island, N. Y.

It is a neatly mimeographed newspaper nearly attaining a professional air. For example, as to the news it gives, it announced the coming of the AMAZING MAN COMICS before it even hit the magazine stores! It even announced the coming of two new cartoon characters in AMAZING MYSTERY FUNNIES, The FANTOM OF THE FAIR, and SPEED CENTAUR. Also news of this department itself was given before it even appeared. It gives you news that is news, science-fictional inclined of course. Another interesting department in FANTASY NEWS is the MOVIE DEPART-



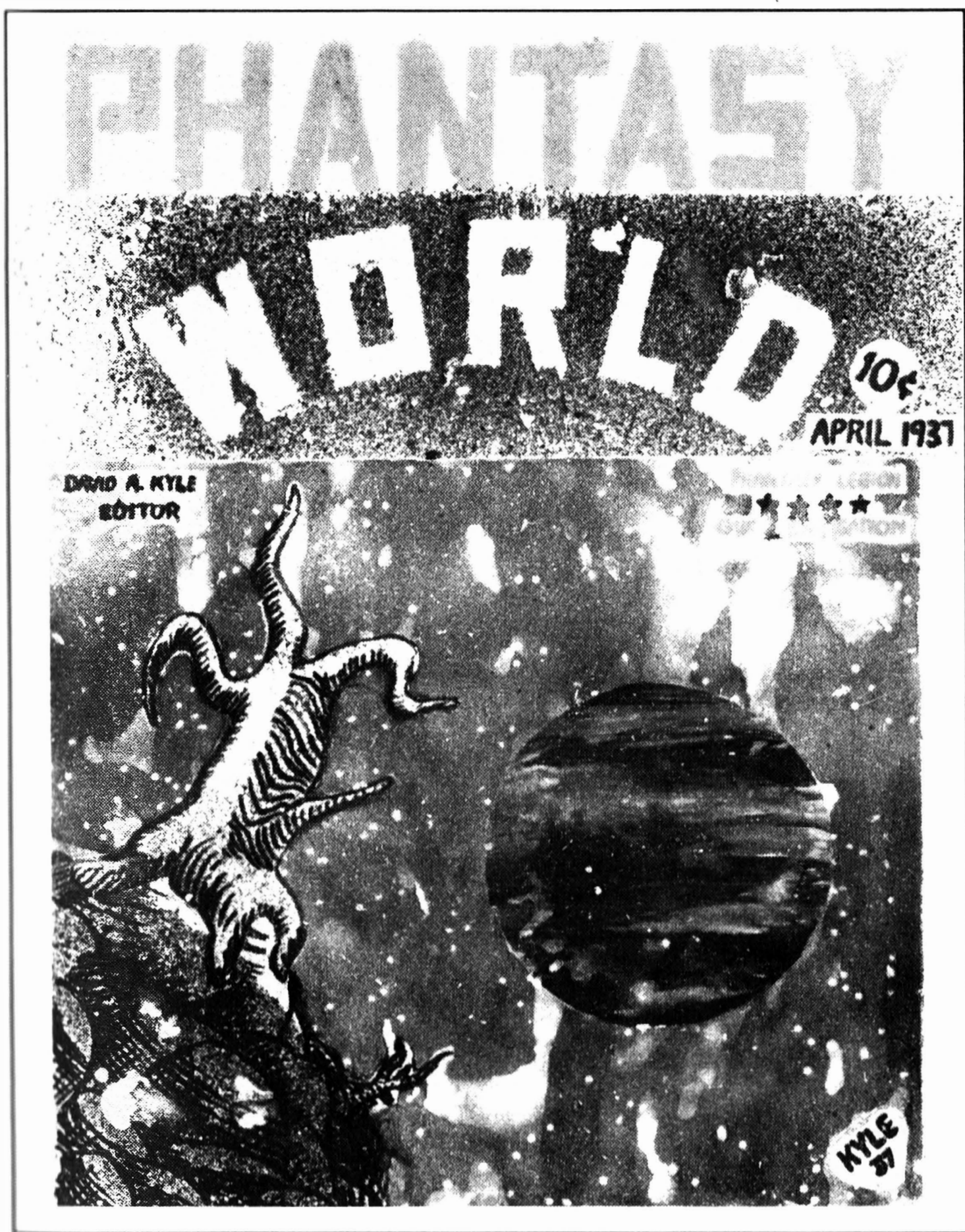
MENT, in which the reporter gives the forecast of coming fantasy pictures. It announced DRACULA'S DAUGHTER, SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, WUTHERING HEIGHTS, ON BORROWED TIME, etc. Besides this there is a fan magazine review, professional Science Fiction magazine news and review, and many others. FANTASY NEWS has many reporters, (including myself!), and it does not miss up on anything.

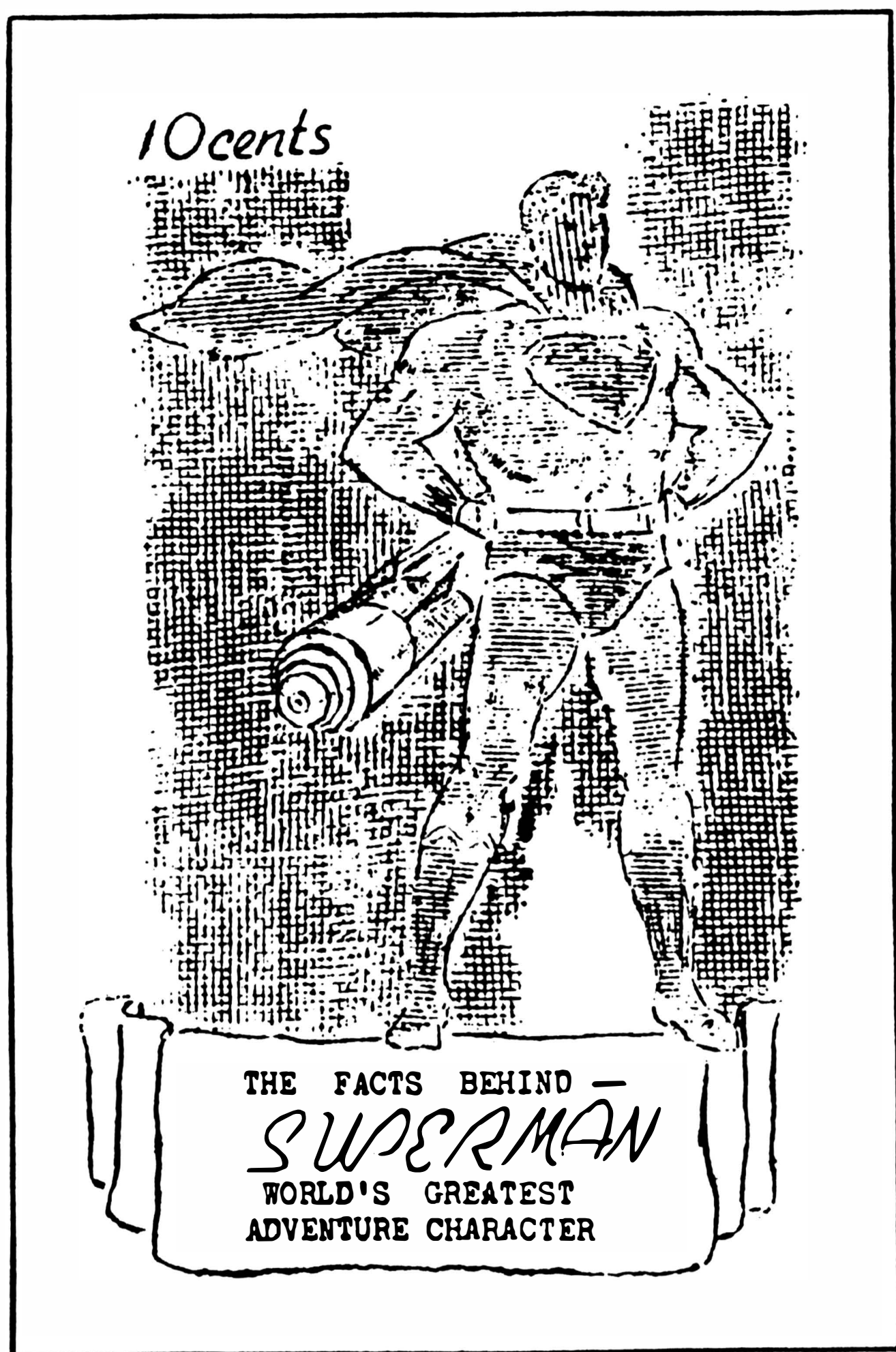
Here was an odd case to consider: a comic book text feature that commented on comic book news that appeared in an sf fanzine. (Odder still, the column was written by a young sf fan named John Giunta, who went on to become a well-known comic book artist.) Confused yet?

"Looking Over Your Magazines" (which was replaced by standard text pages after just a few issues) is an outstanding example of the intertwining of sf and comics interests that characterized the embryonic stages of comicdom's evolution. The articles about comics that *did* appear in the amateur magazines of the 1940s tended to be tangential to the main matters at hand. Comic books received little more respect from sf fans than from the general public.

Most comic book fans were unaware of the nods given to their field of interest by sf fandom. They continued to pursue their hobby with no impetus other than their own love of the medium. Collectors quietly put away copies of each issue of the comics as they were published. After all, every surviving pre-Code

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The Facts Behind Superman featured a multi-colored cover, achieved by running the same sheet through the mimeograph machine once for each color.

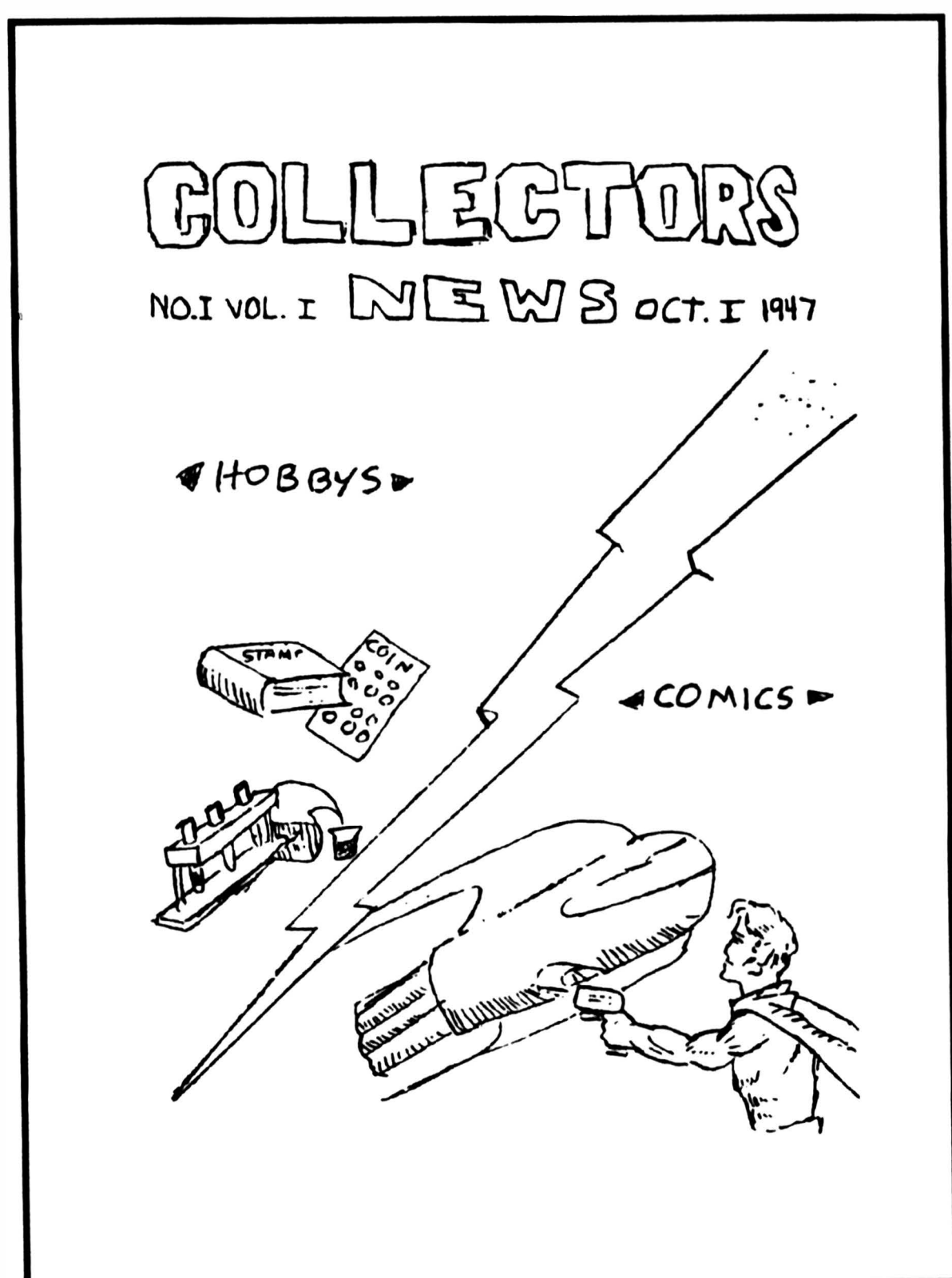
comic was saved by someone who had no way of knowing that comics would one day be valuable or respectable.

Noted Disney historian and rare comics dealer Malcolm Willits wrote, "A classic period is rarely appreciated until it's over. Then people look back and say: 'Wasn't that wonderful!' This usually coincides with the first stirrings of monetary value in material from the period. If something is worth money, people feel it *must* be good. Dealers open up and investors move in, and fairly soon the rich feel comfortable in announcing they collect it too. So the field is off and running, thanks only to the laughed-at saps who loved the material *during* the classic period and protected it until it was acceptable. Well, there I was, one of the laughed-at saps."¹

In October 1947, Mal Willits and Jim Bradley started *The Comic Collector's News*, the only documented fanzine devoted exclusively to comic art in the 1940s. CCN featured rudimentary articles, advertisements and contests relating to comic books. Willits admitted, "Its real purpose was to enhance our own collections by making our wants more widely known."¹ Their slogan was, "Your Comics are Valuable. Don't throw them away."

Over the next two or three years, several issues of *The Comic Collector's News* were published. In 1950, the duo launched an sf zine called *Destiny*. Even so, it included an occasional piece on animation or comics. People who enjoyed both sf and comics were called *double-fans*.

One of the most interesting and ubiquitous of the double-fans from this period was Ted White of Falls Church, Virginia. White, who went on from the amateur publishing field to become a novelist and editor of the pro sf magazines *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, as well as *Heavy Metal*, published his own fanzine about comic books.



"I'm sure that in many respects I was a typical comics fan," White later wrote. "From 1948 through 1953 or so, I relentlessly tracked down back issues of titles important to me ... by advertising on my school bulletin board and in the local paper, and repeatedly questioning all my friends. Every so often I'd stumble over a small hoard of needed comics, which I would then buy, trade for, or somehow wheedle from the owner."²

White's first comic zine was a one-shot in 1952 called *The Story of Superman*. It was reprinted and revised four times, with the last one in late 1953 or early 1954 retitled: *The Facts Behind Superman*. (Since the last edition was the only one to be circulated beyond White's circle of friends, the zine will henceforth be referred to by its ultimate title.) Along with Eldon K. Everett and Ronald Graham, White wrote the 22-page treatment of the career of the Man of Steel, which sold for 10 cents. *The Facts Behind Superman* was printed on a postcard mimeograph machine. While its size (4" x 6") and print run (less than fifty) were modest, it represented one of the earliest known attempts to write an authoritative, in-depth article about a comic book super hero.

Thirty years later, Ted remembered, "You know, I always had a foot in two different worlds, back then. I was a comics fan—a very serious comics fan, written up by the *Washington Daily News* and the wire services as 'The Boy with Ten Thousand Comics'—but I was also a science fiction fan. Most sf fans looked down their noses at comics—and with some justification. After all, sf fandom had been given a bad name (as had sf itself) by the public media association of science fiction with 'Superman' and 'Buck Rogers,' which were very bad sf, irrespective of their merits as comics."³

Another double-fan, Harlan Ellison, edited *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Science Fiction Society*. In a 1952 issue, he carried an article called "On STF Comix and Such" by Ralph Reese, which recommended that sf fans should

check out the new crop of EC comics. "Their art is top-notch stuff," he wrote. "Really fine work by artists who you can tell are not hacks but take pride in their work. Leading the artists of these magazines is a fellow named Wally Wood."⁴ Soon, EC inspired a spate of fanzines devoted to that company's remarkable output.

Jimmy Taurasi, who had published *Fantasy Times* with its significant quota of comics news, put forth the first of the EC zines: *Fantasy-Comics*. Actually, it wasn't strictly devoted to EC, nor did it cover the horror titles. Taurasi (sometimes using the pseudonym Lane Stannard) focused only on the sf-oriented EC titles, as well as the sf comics from others publishers like DC, Ziff-Davis and ACG. But Taurasi illustrated the cover of *Fantasy-Comics* #1 (September-October 1952) with full-sized tracings of the *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy* logos, and wrote inside, "Today these two EC twins are still the leaders in the field [of true science-fiction comics]."⁵ This newspaper-format fanzine lasted through #15 (December 1953). It was revived in 1960 for at least two more issues.

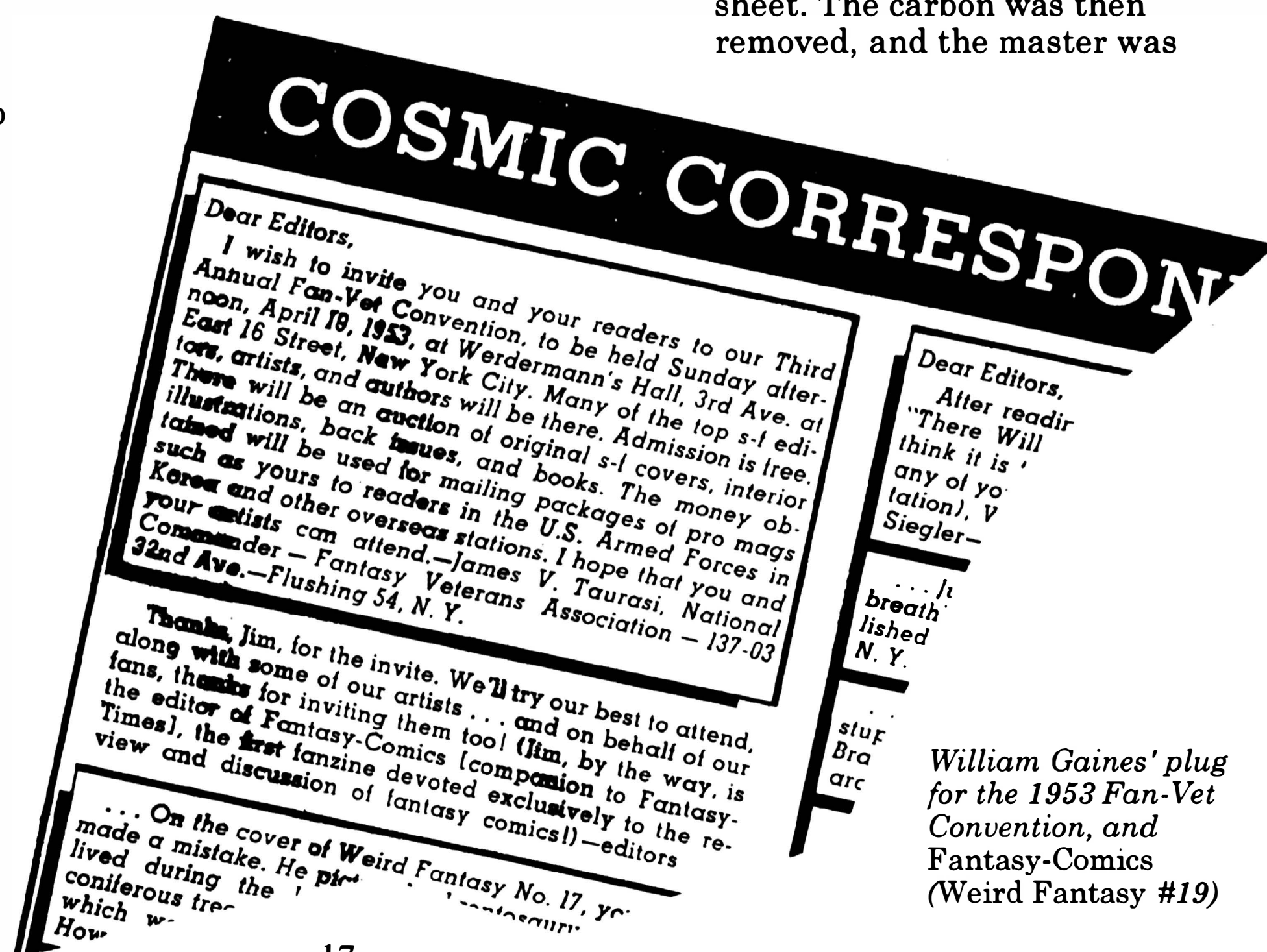
The EC Fan Bulletin appeared next. It was published by Robert "bhob" Stewart, who lowered the



James V. Taurasi, 1937

case and added the "h" to his first name to avoid being confused with another Bob Stewart then in sf fandom. The first issue came out in the summer of 1953, after a plug in *Weird Science* #20 (July-August 1953) brought in about eighty orders. It was printed via hectograph, a primitive printing process that had the virtue of being inexpensive.

A hectograph kit consisted of the printing apparatus, and the materials to prepare hecto "masters." The masters were special sheets of letter-sized paper with a coated backing sheet, something like a piece of thick carbon paper. The ink surface was facing up, so that when one rolled the master into a typewriter, the typing would be transferred in reverse onto the back of the top sheet. The carbon was then removed, and the master was



placed ink-side down on a flat gelatin surface (in a pan or on special pads) until the ink was totally absorbed into the gelatin. Sheets of paper were then carefully placed onto the gelatin, where they would pick up enough of the ink to make a copy. (Red, blue and green colored inks could be used on a single page, to add variety to the usual purple color.) Up to a hundred copies might be made, though fifty was the norm, and the printing process was labor-intensive.

Among other features in *The EC Fan Bulletin* #1 was an account of the Fan-Vet Convention (also plugged in EC comics) on April 19th, 1953, held by the Fantasy Veterans Association. Most of the EC staff attended, including Bill Gaines (publisher), Al Feldstein (writer) and Jack Kamen (artist). On this occasion, Wally Wood displayed the original art to "My World," which had not yet been published. The *Bulletin* also carried the first of many diagrams of the EC office lay-out.

There was only one more issue of Stewart's fanzine, about three months later, which sported a striking cover with an outer space theme in the Feldstein tradition by fan Bill Spicer. Spicer heard about EC fanzines either through the plug in *Weird Science* #20, or a plug in *Fantasy-Comics*. "I know I started receiving a few sf zines around 1951 or 1952 after seeing mentions of them in sf pulp mags," Bill wrote recently. "[I received] Malcolm Willits' photo-offset *Destiny*, vintage 1951, among others. These were my first exposure to fanzines per se, at about age thirteen."

Benefiting from Stewart's exposure to sf zines, *The EC Fan Bulletin* was a high-quality publication. The writing was literate, and at least some of the art was quite good. However, Stewart was unhappy with the limitations of hectograph printing and discontinued the fanzine.

Upon seeing *The EC Fan Bulletin* #1, it is said, Bill Gaines decided to form the EC Fan-Addict Club. (The newsletter of the official EC fan club was *The National Fan-Addict Bulletin*, which ran five issues, from November 1953 to December 1954.)

In the wake of Stewart's publication, a number of other EC fanzines appeared. They were generally printed by hectograph, ditto or mimeograph, and of variable quality. They were *EC World Press*, *The EC Slime Sheet*, *The Mad Melvin Newsletter*, *EC Scoop*, *The EC S-F Mags Fanzine*, and *The EC Fan Journal*. (Bill Spicer remembers one devoted to the work of Graham Ingels called *Graham Backers*.) A number of them sent reporters to visit EC's New York offices and printed trip reports; Bill Gaines always seemed willing to accommodate these enthusiastic efforts, and spent time visiting with them in person or on the phone. News flowed freely into the pages of the fanzines.

Also in 1954, an interesting amateur strip fanzine saw print, in the form of Larry Clowers' and Mac Young's *This Is IT!* Despite the fact that both issues were published by mimeograph, perhaps the most difficult medium for faithfully reproducing artwork, the strips have considerable visual appeal. #2 is highlighted by an "Air Battle" strip by Clowers which is a clear homage to Alex Toth's "Thunder Jet" strip in *Frontline Combat* #8. The humor and horror genres from EC are also represented.

Meanwhile, the hue and cry against sex and violence in comic books rose to a fever pitch with the publication of Dr. Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. In a reaction to the anti-comics campaign of Wertham and others, bhub Stewart was reinvigorated and determined to publish a new, more impressive EC fanzine. This was to be *Potrzenie*, which was envisioned as a forum for the writings of Larry Stark, EC's prolific "number one fan." Ted White acted as publisher of the first issue, which turned out to be the only one, due to the discouraging response to a plug in the *EC Fan-Addict Bulletin*. It seemed that the average age of the respondents was between nine and thirteen years old. Though Stewart had prepared much of #2, White set the stencils aside, only publishing them later in an sf apa. Texas fan Larry Clowers took over the publication of *Potrzenie* with

#3, and kept it going for several more issues.

In October 1954, the Comics Code Authority was established. This meant the end of EC's horror and sf comics. In desperation, EC came up with its New Direction titles, but the line's days were numbered. The last EC fanzine begun while the publisher was in the comic book business was Ron Parker's *Hoohah!*, which eventually presented topnotch work by Archie Goodwin, Ted White, Fred von Bernewitz, Larry Ivie, Bill Spicer and virtually all the older and more articulate EC followers. One of the most memorable articles was Larry Stark's "Elegy" to EC. In *Hoohah!* #9 (October 1957) Parker printed a list of his readers, which totaled forty-four.

The other key EC fanzine was Fred von Bernewitz' *Complete EC Checklist*, which first became available in 1956, and went through many incarnations, each more complete and accurate than the last. Bill Gaines (who provided some of the data) was so impressed with Fred's work that he paid him to produce periodic indexes to *Mad* for years to come.

Naturally, there was much trading and selling between EC fans. There is an interesting attitude at the time about those who sold comics for profit. Larry Stark wrote an article condemning such practices, calling it "scalping" and explaining how he felt it would ruin the hobby.

It was a sad day for comic fans when EC finally discontinued its line of comics. But EC fandom really didn't die. Like *Hoohah!*, other fanzines carried the torch for EC after its demise. Often the focus was on *Mad*, and the work of Harvey Kurtzman in *Trump*, *Humbug* and (later) *Help*.

"There was a group of EC and comics fans (and of course there was an overlap) who wanted to

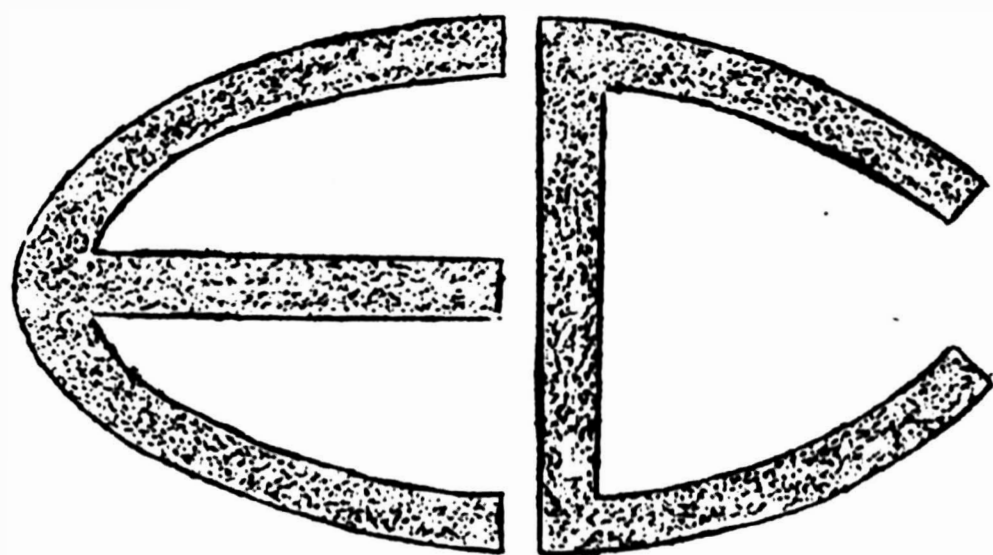
Right: An array of key EC fanzines, including Fred von Bernewitz' essential index to EC, Bill Spicer's Feldstein-inspired cover to The EC Fan Bulletin #2, covers from Ron Parker's legendary Hoohah! (which some consider the best EC zine), and the masthead to James V. Taurasi's Fantasy-Comics.

THE VAULT OF
HORROR
WEIRD
SCIENCE
FRONTLINE
COMBAT

TALES FROM
THE *CRYPT* OF
TERROR
WEIRD
FANTASY
CRIME
SUSPENSE

THE HAUNT OF
FEAR
TWO-FISTED
TALES
SHOCK
SUSPENSE

THE COMPLETE



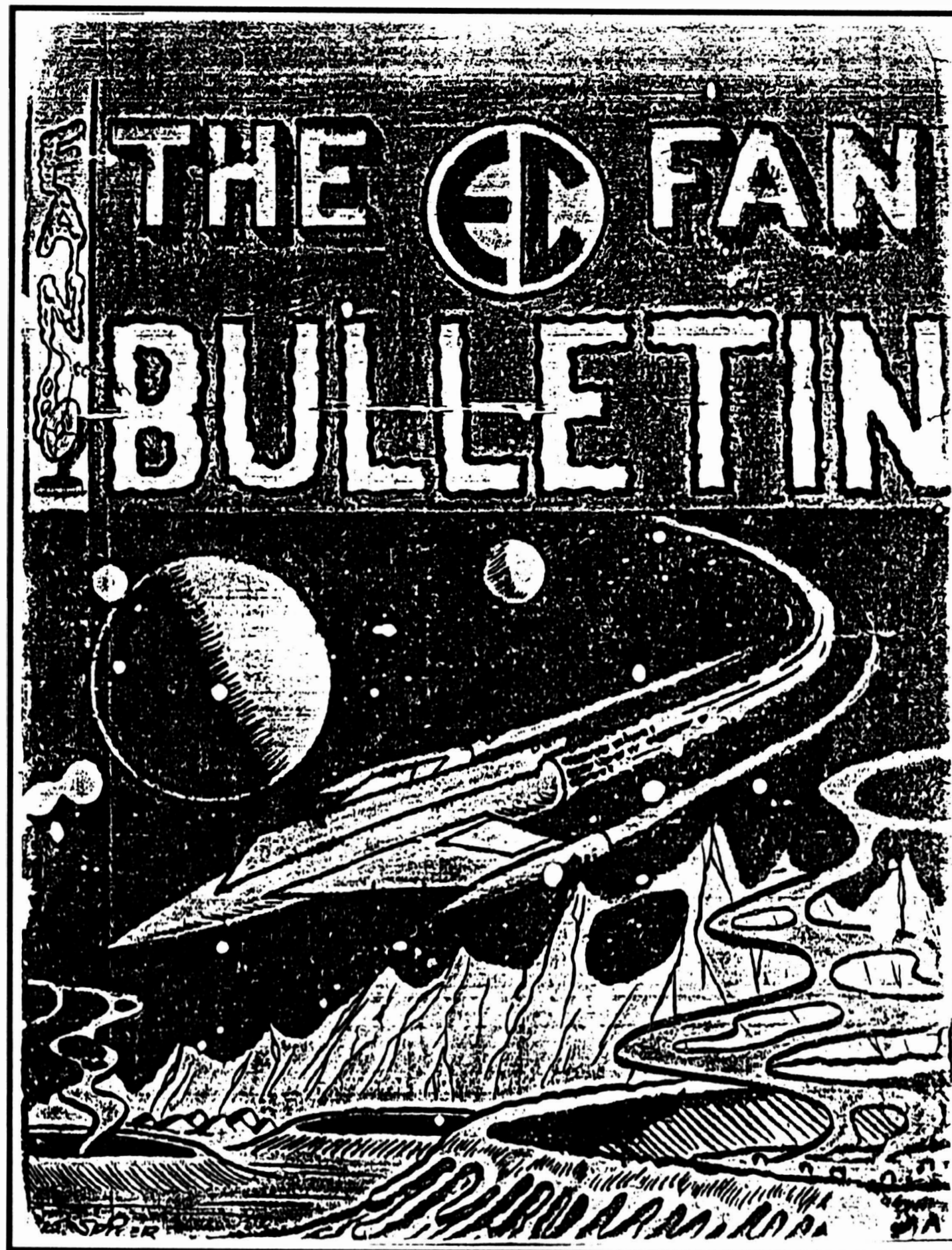
CHECKLIST

COMPILED BY *FRED VON BERANEVITZ*

MAD

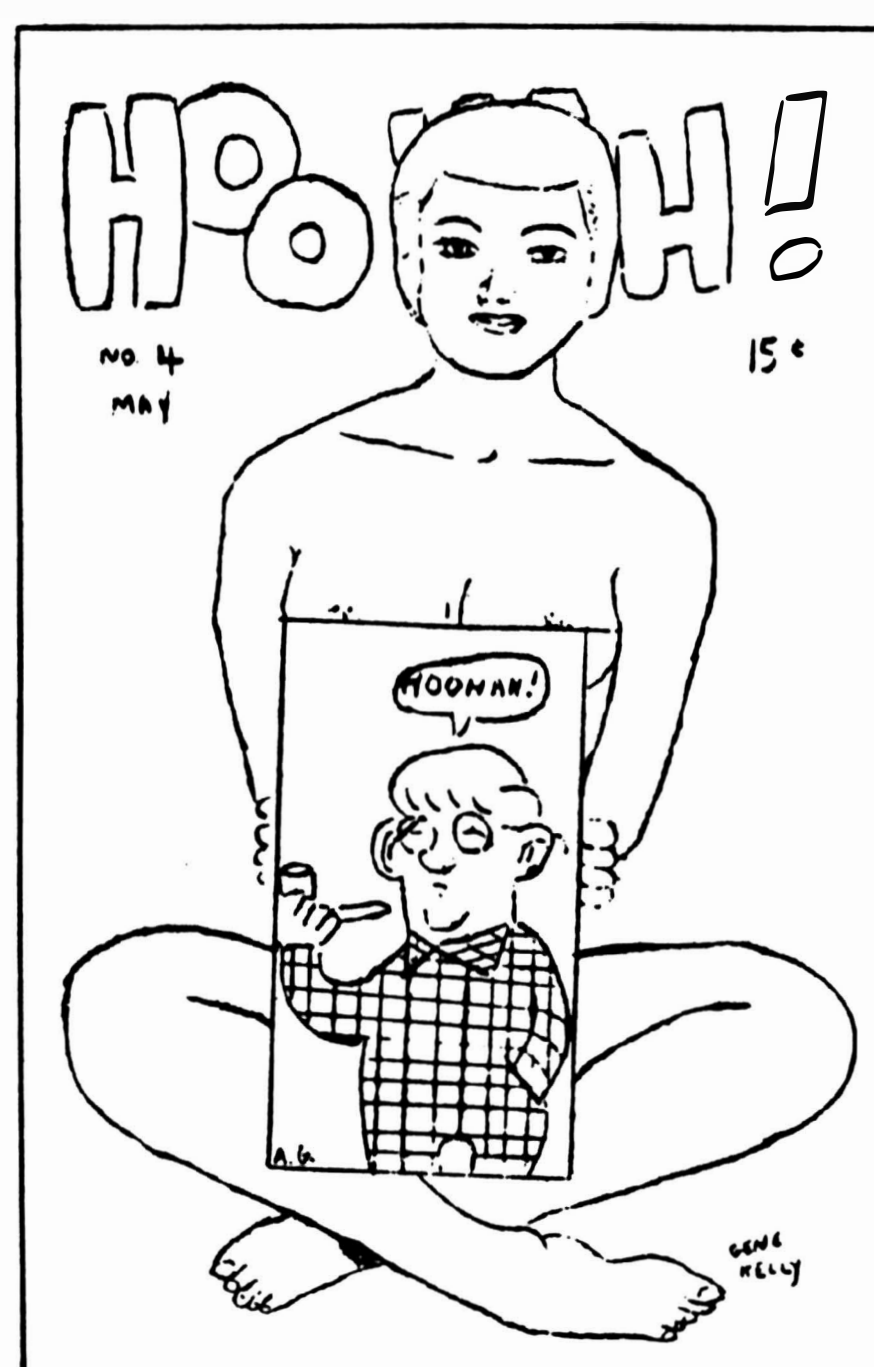
PANIC

WEIRD
SCIENCE-FANTASY



FANTASY-COMICS

"The Newspaper Of The Science-Fiction Comic Field!"



still be fans but who had nothing to be fans of except Kurtzman's stuff," John Benson recently wrote. "This group was quite productive as far as fanzines went. These fanzines had lots of stuff about comics, especially where the old EC artists could be found in the current comics on the stands. This was really a continuation of EC fandom."

Some of the fanzines in this period were *Good Lord/Spoof* from Doug Brown (1957), *Frantic* from Joe Moser (1958); *EChhhh!* from Ken Winter (1959); *Squatront* (no relation to the later fanzine, spelled as one word) from Mike Britt (1959); *Fanfare* from Marty Pahls (1959); a number of titles from Sig Case and Gary Delain starting in 1958, including *Gamut*; Joe Pilati's *Smudge* (1962); John Benson's *Image*, which ran from January 1960 to 1962. In addition to their interest in Kurtzman and EC artists, these amateur publications included material on comic strips, paperbacks, movies and occasionally super hero comics.

"If anything worked to weaken fifties fandom, it was that broad range of interests," Benson explained, "because most fans of that day thought of fandom as a teen-age activity related to their enthusiasm for currently produced material, and their broader interests naturally led them more to real-world activities when they reached adulthood."

Robert Crumb was active in fandom during this period. He contributed a strip to Ken Winter's *EChhhh!* #3 (May 1959), and showed up in other fanzines at least through 1960. He and his brother Charles (also a talented cartoonist) published three issues of an offset amateur comic in 1958 called *Foo!*, which are now much sought-after collector's items. Robert Crumb was just one of several artists in what has come to be called satire fandom who eventually became the spearheads of the underground comix movement.

EC/satire fandom of the late 1950s was small, but, at least in the eyes of some, this was a virtue. One could keep up with all the fanzines, when a fandom was "human-sized." Editors didn't have

to produce staggering print runs with all the attendant labor; most probably had circulations of fifty or sixty copies (though exact figures are unavailable). Partly because the EC comics that they admired were no longer being published, partly because of the wide range of interests represented, and partly because of a desire to keep the size of their fandom manageable, active outreach to comic book fans across the country was not generally a priority for this group.

Still, there is an intriguing item on the inside back cover of *Gamut* #1 (September 1960). Publisher Gary Delain probably wrote this entreaty, which reads in part, "Have you registered with Comic Art Fandom yet? The purpose of CAF is to compile and publish an annual directory of active comic art fans and comic artists." Given the tiny circulation *Gamut* would have received (to mostly EC fans who were already known), it isn't surprising that nothing more was heard of the proposed directory.

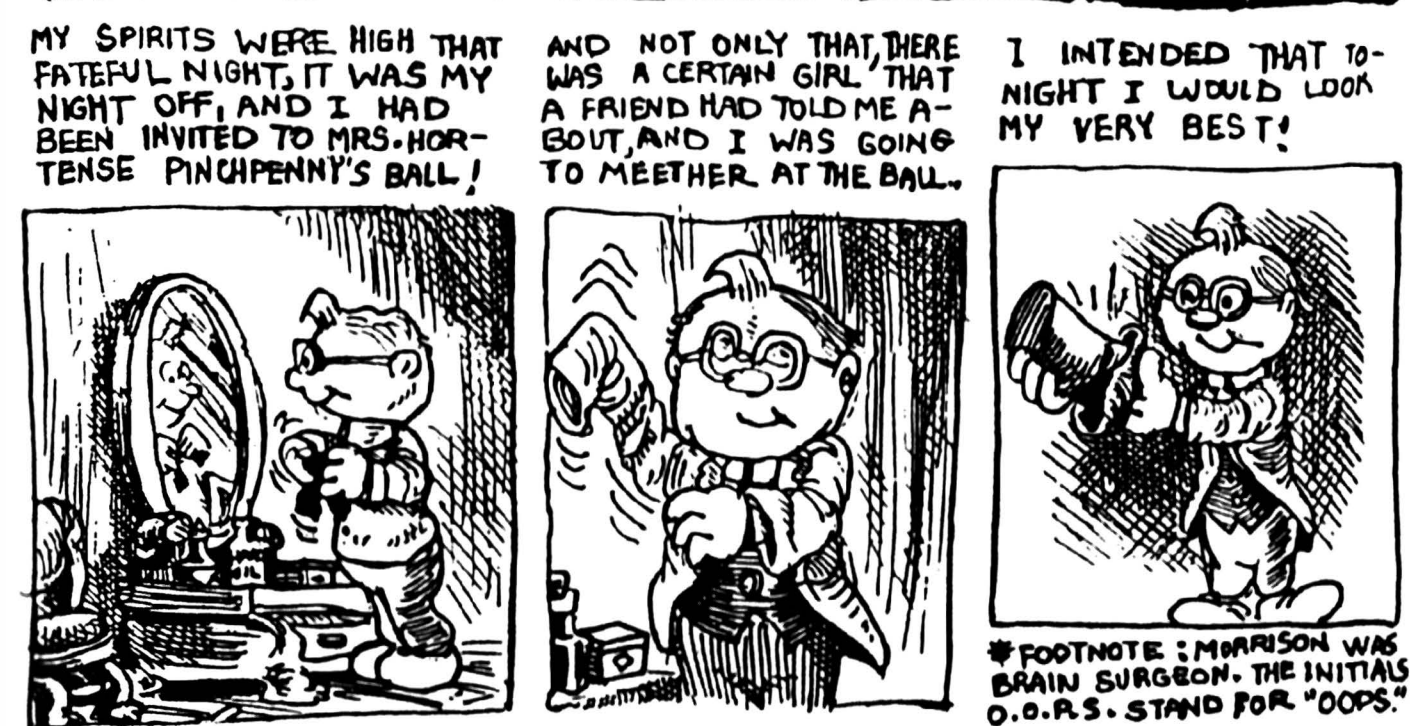
Collectors of super hero comics in the mid-fifties found pickings among new releases rather slim, and could have used the encouragement of a fandom just for them. Scattered across the country, in both big cities and the smallest of towns, few had heard of EC or satire fandom. They endured in solitude, or in pockets. How would they meet other fans? Perhaps they would notice another older collector at their favorite newsstand, and strike up a conversation. Or, through word-of-mouth, a fan might hear about someone else who shared his hobby. "You ought to talk to Earl's cousin. He saves those funny books too."

A small lifeline did exist for those who read the professional sf magazines, like *Other Worlds* and *Search*: "Personals" columns that carried an occasional notice about comics. The sf fanzines also printed Want Ads. A correspondence might begin ... an address might be passed from one fan to another ... a new connection could be made. It was an inefficient process of stops and starts, connections and disconnections. But gradually a

few book dealers began taking heed of requests they'd received for old comic books, and began buying them up for re-sale to a growing clientele. One of the earliest of these dealers was Claude Held in Buffalo, New York.

Claude had been sending out lists of back issue sf magazines when he was still in high school in the late 1930s. After being discharged from the US Navy in 1946, he opened a bookstore while going to the University of Buffalo. "I had all my classes in the morning, and I wanted some kind of part time job," Held said in a recent interview. "I got the idea of opening up a book store that would be open from noon to about nine. The comics started from that, because a guy who just got out of the Army pulled up his car in front of my store, and asked me if I bought comics. I said, 'Yeah, a dollar a hundred.' He said okay, and unloaded seventeen hundred comics from his car. I had just started the store and didn't have much dough, so I offered him \$15.00 for the lot, and he agreed. Now just stop and think, this was 1946. How would you like to have those today?" Claude sold a number of comics from that set to a few collectors in the ensuing years for about a dime a piece, but wanted to hold on to most of them at first, because he liked them. Still, word got out and a few fans (like Bill Thailing) made their way to his store and managed to coax him into letting go of some of this original stash, which was dramatically enlarged around 1955.

Held bought an incredible lot of comics for a nickel a piece from a local bookstore owner who was in desperate straits around 1955. "When I got home, the most amazing sight awaited me on the side porch of my house," he said. "Cartons and cartons, filled with very early comic books, all stacked neatly and in excellent condition. I recall *specifically* that this fellow had at least ten to twelve copies of *Superman* #2 and #3 in near mint condition. He had put them aside when they first came out. There was a whole handful of copies of *Planet Comics* #1. I got those and put them aside with the ones I'd bought right after the war."



Splash to a strip by R. Crumb in Foo! #2
(October 1958)

All through the late 1940s and 1950s, Held had been putting out a for sale list of sf magazines, fantasy books, etc. "Some time around the late 1950s, I finally began to throw some comics on the list. A lot of people were infuriated that I was charging 50 cents or a dollar for a 10 cent comic book—but, they were buying them! And it just continued to increase in volume from there."

When G. A. Bibby inaugurated his long-running adzine *The Fantasy Collector* in 1958, there would inevitably be a few ads for comics sandwiched among the notices for Burroughs material, movie stills, posters et al.

John Benson wrote, "I recall going to a book store in Philadelphia in 1956 to look through their vast stock of nickel comics on the racks. I found one EC, which the owner ... told me got in there in error, and that if I wanted it, it would cost me 50 cents. That same day, I saw a box of Golden Age comics behind the counter being packaged for a mail-order customer."

One of the best-known collectors and comic book dealers of the late 1950s was Bill Thailing of Cleveland, Ohio. Thailing was a railroad signal operator who had begun buying comic books in the mid-1930s in order to read the strips that weren't carried in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. He remembered, "I needed the Dick Tracy Sunday strips, so I bought *Popular Comics* and *Super Comics*. Also, *Ace Comics* had the Katzenjammer Kids and *Prince Valiant*. *King Comics* had Flash Gordon, which never appeared in the *Sunday Plain Dealer*." When costumed heroes came along, Bill's interest

gravitated toward *Batman*, *Detective Comics* and *Marvel Mystery Comics*. During World War II, he served with MacArthur's army in the Philippine liberation campaign, and when he returned to the US, found that his mother had tossed out his comics.

It wasn't until 1954 that he ran across some Whitman BLBs at a rummage sale. Thailing recalled, "Here I was pushing thirty, and thinking to myself, 'Why not have the things I enjoyed when I was 10?' So the bug bit me, and I began collecting all over again." In order to obtain his own personal wants (almost exclusively comics before 1943) he began corresponding with fans (like Ted White) who placed ads in the Personals column of *Other Worlds* and other sf pro-zines of the middle-to-late 1950s. Thailing soon developed a reputation as a knowledgeable dealer with the heart of a collector.

Larry Ivie was a key comic fan in the late 1950s. He had been a long-time fan of the Justice Society and then EC. Born in 1936, he had begun reading comics during the war, and had absorbed a tremendous amount of knowledge about them; Ivie was one of the earliest fans to be considered an authority of sorts on the subject of comic book history. In the late 1950s, he was an art student in New York City, where he developed into a stylish artist in the Al Williamson mode. Kicking around the art circles in the Big Apple, Larry was befriended by numerous pros and was asked by Williamson to ghost-pencil some of Archie Publications' *The Double Life of Private Strong* #2 (August 1959). His artwork appeared in a wide variety of fanzines of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Ivie was intensely interested in all comics. He had a huge collection, which included the classic super hero comics, a complete run of *The Spirit*, and a nearly-complete run of Carl Barks comics. His apartment was

Below: Larry Ivie, one of the most knowledgeable comic fans of the late 1950s, photographed a few years later when he was publishing his own competitor to Castle of Frankenstein, called *Monsters and Heroes*.



laid out like a library, and that's just what it was. Although he published fanzines, his real importance to comic fandom was that his apartment in New York was a mecca for literally hundreds of fans over the years.

Among Larry's fan publications, the most significant was *Concept*, which ran six issues, from 1956 to 1959. Although it was a general interest fanzine, most issues had something about comics. *Concept* #2 (which sported a mimeographed cover by Al Williamson) offered an article called "The Test of Time," sub-headed "one of a series of articles on the history of comic books," a brief look at the super hero field over the years. The third issue (February 1957) featured Superman in "the *Concept* Hall of Fame," in addition to fiction by Ted White and movie reviews by Archie Goodwin.

Ivie's great disappointment was that National wasn't interested in his proposed revival of the Justice Society of America, to be called the Justice Legion of the World, which would be made up of the sons and daughters of the original JSA. (He continues to feel, however, that his meetings with National to pitch this idea circa 1958 contributed to the eventual re-tooling of the JSA.)⁶

Double-fans were sometimes *multi-fans*, with interests that crossed across three or more genres of popular fantasy, from sf to Burroughs to comics to movie serials. Occasionally, a fanzine would cater specifically to these fans. *Sata* was a rather unusual fanzine that crossed between sf, EC, Burroughs and fantasy fandoms. Begun by Dan Adkins in March of 1956, *Sata* was taken over with issue #6 by 19-year-old Bill Pearson. At first, *Sata* carried articles, fiction and spot art. #1 through #6 were printed via spirit duplicator.

Commonly known as "ditto" printing, this process had the virtue of being easier than hectograph duplication, though still inexpensive. The ditto master was prepared like a hecto master, with ink transferring to the back of the master top sheet with the application of pressure. Like hecto, multiple colors could be applied onto the same sheet. Then it would be attached to the drum of a spirit duplicator (also known as a ditto machine), and as paper was fed into the machine, the turning drum would impress the image from the master onto each sheet. Gradually, the copies would lighten until they could no longer satisfactorily be read. (The upper limit varied, but the average was about 250 to 300 copies; with special long-run masters, this could be extended. Of course, many fanzines had circulations of 100 copies or less.)

The quality of ditto printing varied considerably, depending on the skill of the operator. Dan Adkins and Bill Pearson had no peer in this department. *Sata* was famous for being much better reproduced than other ditto zines. Adkins and Pearson never revealed their secrets. When Pearson decided to shift the emphasis primarily to high quality comic strips, *Sata* made the transition to photo-offset printing. Several of the strips were illustrated by Larry Ivie, which was not surprising, since Pearson and Ivie lived in the same building on 23rd Street in New York City.

In his "Chicago Comics Fandom: A History," Joe Sarno told about a regional sf convention in Cincinnati in 1957 or 1958 where he first became aware of the number of sf fans who were interested in comics. "A dealer had pulled up to the conference motel with a trunkload full of old magazines and books to sell to collectors wishing to complete their runs of *Amazing*, and *Astounding*, and

Gnome Press and Arkham House. Mixed in with the magazines and books were several EC science fiction comics, and Flash Gordon BLBs. The very first thing the dealer sold out of his trunk were the ECs, and almost everyone handled the Flash Gordon BLBs."⁷ Among the browsers that Sarno specifically remembered that day were Harlan Ellison and Jim Harmon.

"Throughout those late 1950s," Joe continued, "I had the pleasure of visiting many homes of science fiction fans in the Midwest area, and many of them had small collections of comics, BLBs and comic strips. Buck and Juanita Coulson had some great Golden Age super hero books, and a lot of nice EC comics. George Scithers [publisher of *Amra*, the Robert E. Howard fanzine] had some great Fawcett and Ziff-Davis and Avon science fiction and super hero titles from the late 1940s and early 1950s. Countless others had complete runs of *Mad* comics. The list is endless."

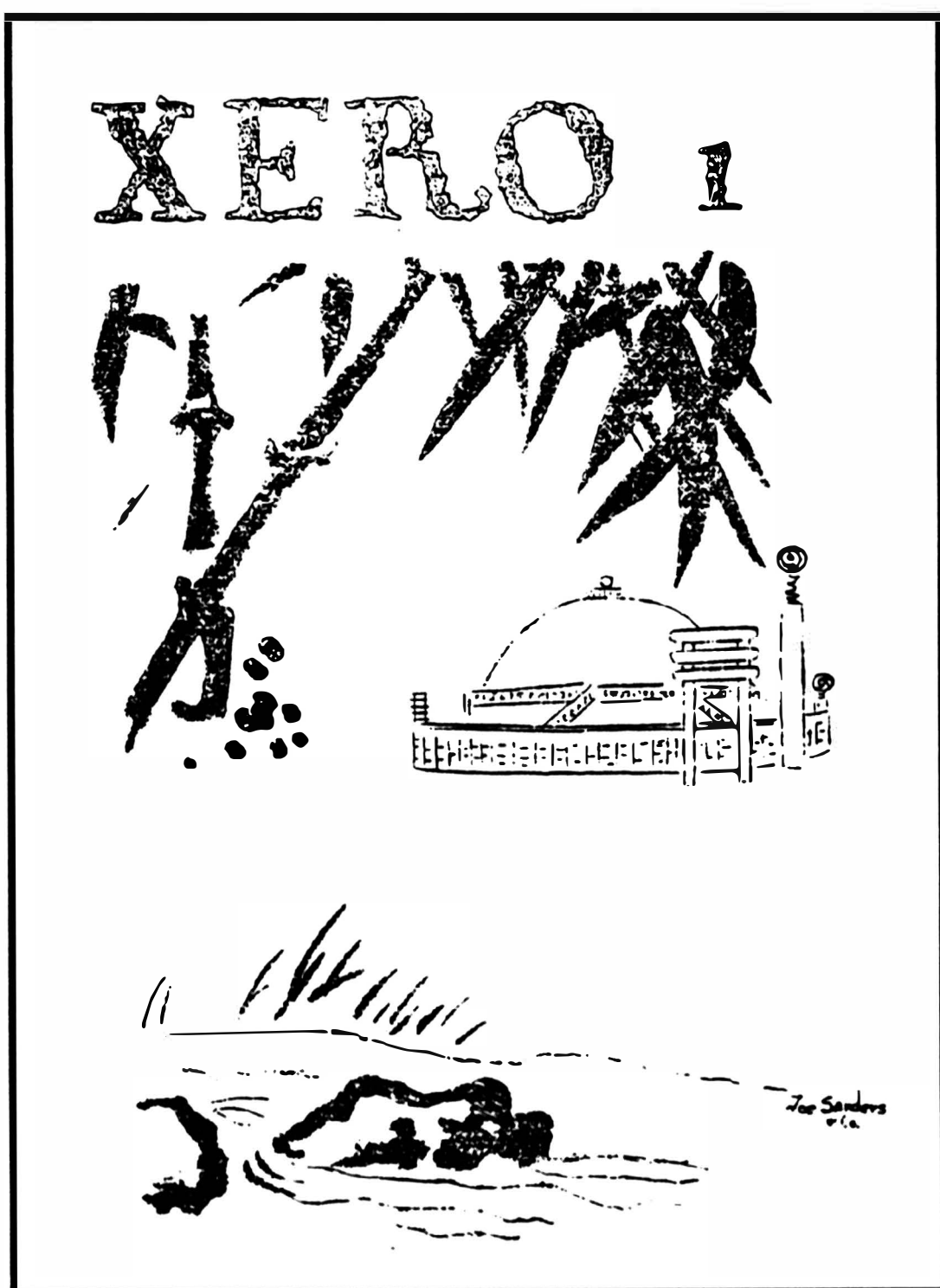
In sf fanzine *Peon* #38 (December 1956), published by Charles Lee Riddle, Jim Harmon expressed his great affection for the comics of the past. His "Harmony" column began with the line, "I remember comic books." From there he lamented the sanitizing effect that the Comics Code Authority had on comics. "But there was another day of lurid adventure, naked heroes and heroines, and lusty violence. This was the era of *Jungle Comics*, *Planet Comics*, *Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *Captain Marvel*, *Tom Mix Comics*, and of *Superman*—who alone, remains in faded fashion." In a brief four-page article, Harmon discussed Fiction House comics, the members of the JSA, and opined, "Probably the greatest comic-book character of all appeared chiefly in newspapers, The Spirit by Will Eisner."⁸

Harmon's column ends on a personal note. "It must be a year since I've sat down and read a comic book. These days when I reach for a copy of Superman, it's the third word in the title of a play by G. B. Shaw. I must be growing up, and I'm not at all sure it's a good thing."

"I Remember Comic Books" (as the piece is commonly called, though it had no formal title other than "Harmony") is especially significant because it pre-figured a seminal series of articles on old comics that would be published starting in 1960; in fact, Jim Harmon would author one of the best of that important series. And his entry would end with the same sentiments that had ended his *Peon* reminiscence.

Science fiction fandom was thriving, and in its midst were folks who would play important roles in the upcoming comic fandom movement. One of the sf clubs at the time was the New Futurians in the New York City vicinity. Toward the end of the decade, two of the newest members of this group were a young married couple named Dick and Pat Lupoff.

Born in Brooklyn in 1935, Dick had been vacationing in Florida with his family when he and his older brother bought a copy of the first issue of *Whiz Comics*. "I remember the origin story of this little kid walking down this spooky subway tunnel past seven ugly statues representing the seven deadly sins," Dick recalled recently. "It was so creepy and atmospheric in contrast to this bright sunny day in Florida. It made an immense impression on me." Captain Marvel became his favorite comic book character. Dick went on to read many comics as a child growing up in the 1940s, as did his future wife Pat.



Xero #1 (September 1960) with "The Big Red Cheese," the first installment of the *All in Color, For a Dime* series. Dick and Pat Lupoff made a memorable impression as the subjects of this article at the 1960 World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh. Below: Sylvia White could work magic with a mimeograph stencil and a few shading plates.

"I was an only child, and my parents thought I shouldn't read comics because I was a very good reader and they thought that was beneath me," Pat recalled. "I would sneak out with my allowance, buy all these comics, and take them back up to my room and read them." She liked a variety of comics, from *The Marvel Family* to Mary Jane and Sniffles in *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies Comics*.

Dick became involved in sf fandom when he was in high school in 1950. He had always aspired to become a writer, and "once I saw these fanzines, they looked to me like a sort of halfway station between just schoolboy stuff ... and real professional publications. I thought, 'Aha! All right, I will get into these magazines, and from there I'll move on and become a professional writer!'" Dick earned a degree in journalism in 1956 (which he considered a total waste), entered the US Army, and while stationed in Indianapolis in 1957, met Pat on a blind date. They were married the following year, and soon were living in Manhattan and contemplating publishing their own fanzine.

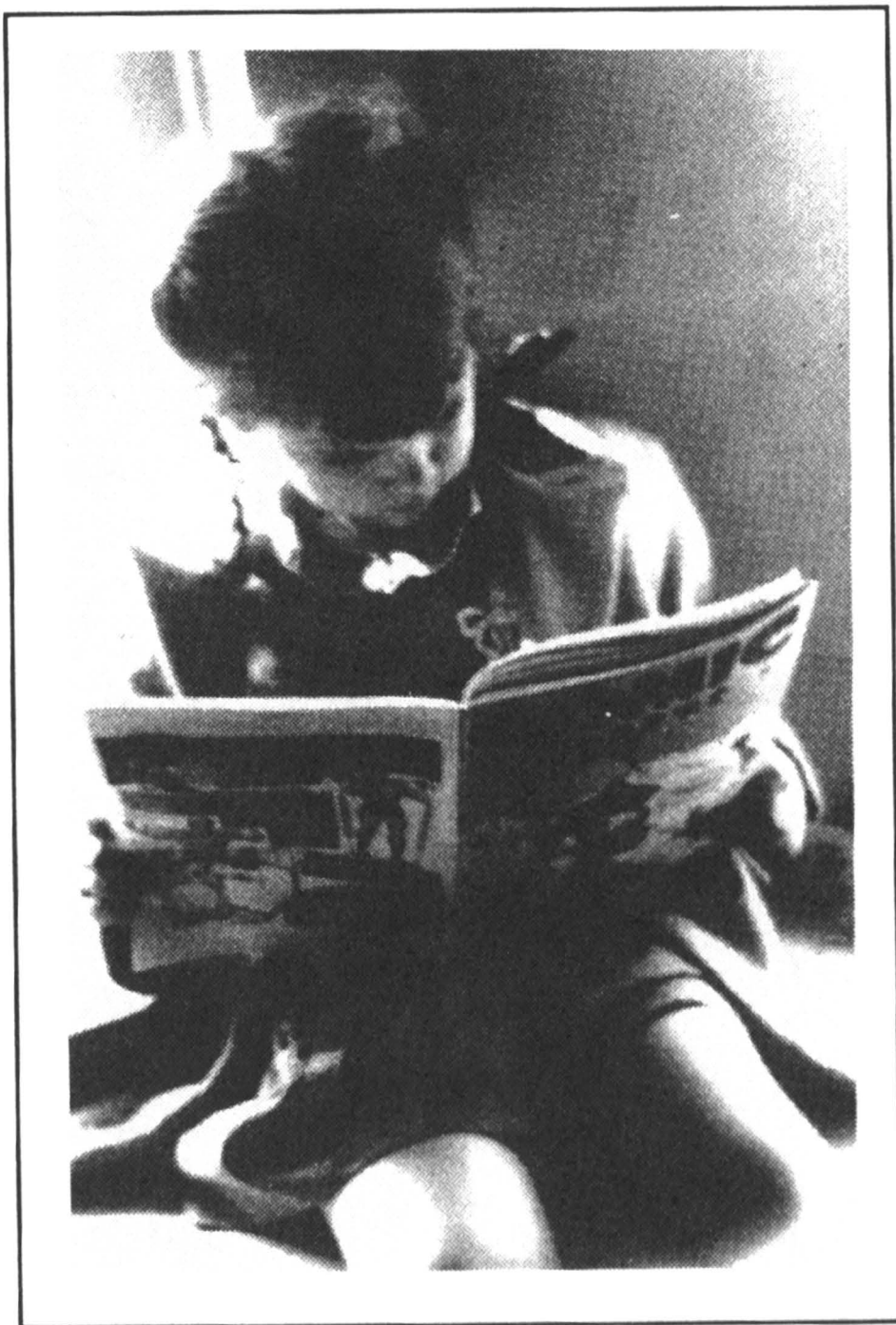
The name *Xero* came from their desire to come up with a title that was unusual and attention-getting, and would have some sort of fantasy connotation. "We thought of *Xanadu* and somebody told us there was already a fanzine called *The Xanadu Newsletter*, so to avoid treading on someone else's toes, we looked in the dictionary for other words that began with the letter X. And we came across 'xero.' It's a Greek root meaning dry, but that isn't why we picked it. We picked it because it was short and interesting."

The Lupoffs envisioned *Xero* to be more than an sf fanzine. "Science fiction fans at the time were expanding their interests," Lupoff explained. "Some fanzines ... were becoming more journals of contemporary popular culture. Fans were writing about music, jazz, rock and roll, movies. That was the nature of my interest in comics." As

he considered what to write for the first issue, Lupoff decided to write about his love for Captain Marvel comics.

"I did no research whatsoever. It was just plumbing the depths of nostalgic recollection. The article was called 'The Big Red Cheese,' but ... I said that this was the first installment of a series called '...And All In Color For A Dime.'" [Henceforth abbreviated as AICFAD.]





Maggie Curtis, age 3½, reads Comic Capers #6 (Fall 1946).

"The Big Red Cheese" begins with Dick's evocative account of finding that issue of *Whiz Comics* on the newsstand of the local pharmacy in Venice, Florida, and making the acquaintance with "the greatest of all comic-book heroes, Captain Marvel."⁹ Lupoff duly covered the origin of the Big Red Cheese (as Dr. Sivana had nicknamed him), the particularly whimsical flavor of the strip, the cast of characters, and the other members of the Marvel Family.

Dick also erroneously revealed that the brain behind Captain Marvel was "Eando Binder." Only later would he discover that it should have been *Otto Binder*; that "Eando" was a contraction of the names of Earl and Otto Binder, which he'd doubtless seen on the byline of the Jon Jarl text stories in those same Fawcett comics—or, on the *Adam Link* sf stories. Otto Binder had briefly co-written sf with his brother, and had continued to use the pseudonym long after his sibling stopped writing.

The errors (which he corrected in an addendum) are unimportant. Dick Lupoff skillfully pinpointed the special appeal of Captain Marvel, and evoked a nigh palpable nostalgia over those innocent comic book tales of the past.

The article ended on a suitably plaintive note. After discussing the Captain Marvel Club, and the various products that were available (stationary, statues, pins), he wrote: "There were Captain Marvel tee-shirts and Captain Marvel beanies...."

"I wish I had a Captain Marvel beanie."

A perfect ending, for it not only conjures up the wistful mood of the young child who yearned for the items he saw in the ad-pages of the comics—but, it brings that yearning forward, this time to the almost painful desire an adult can have to return to the lost innocence of youth.

Dick recently remembered, "I invited all and sundry to contribute articles to the [AICFAD] series. The response was just overwhelming! Because nobody was paying any attention to comics in those days, especially to old comics.

There was this whole generation of people walking around who had grown up on them, so once the spark was lit, things just took off!"

About one hundred copies of *Xero* #1 were printed, and the Lupoffs brought them to the 1960 World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh over the Labor Day weekend. While at the PittCon, they created something of a sensation when they appeared at the masquerade as Captain and Mary Marvel, the only super heroes in a field of as many as fifty costumers.

Pat's Mary Marvel outfit had been easy to make: an extra-large red T-shirt, with the requisite yellow lightning bolt stitched to it. A sash at the waist, and a pillow-case for a cape. Shazam!

The Captain Marvel costume consisted of a pair of red long johns, a yellow sash, and yellow socks pulled up to simulate boots. "I made those yellow wrist decorations by buying a pair of yellow rubber gloves and cutting off the hand part," Dick recalled, laughing. "This was *really* entry-level costume making."

The masquerade took place in a hotel ballroom, with the audience standing around the perimeter. The participants made their entrance, paraded in a circle around the room, and then spiraled in toward the center. Captain and Mary Marvel were received with real enthusiasm from the onlookers. "We didn't win a prize, because they were not great costumes, but everyone just clustered around and wanted to talk about the costumes and the characters they were based on."

Sharing the limelight in the ballroom that night in 1960 were two other fans the Lupoffs had not yet met, who would eventually become close friends: Don Thompson and Maggie Curtis. They were appearing in a costumed group representing the Five Fannish Senses, with Maggie's family, and in fact won the prize for Best Group.

Don and Maggie had met in June 1957 at an sf picnic at the home of pulp magazine writer Basil Wells, with Andre Norton, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett and many others in attendance. In a 1992 interview, Don recalled, "I discovered ... that one of these people was Betsy Curtis, who had written some very good stories for the magazines. And there was this annoying little 14-year-old kid running around. That was Maggie."

Maggie Curtis was a second-generation fan; her mother Betsy, in addition to other writing, published a fanzine around 1950, when the Curtis family lived in Canton, New York. (Ed Curtis was teaching at St. Lawrence University.) It was called *The Literary Cricket*, a Pogo-esque pun on the word 'critic.'

While Don Thompson was a student at Penn State, he had been president of the sf society. A fan of the EC sf titles, and the Kurtzman humor books, he and Maggie found they had comics as a common interest. Don noticed *Humbug* #1 on sale shortly thereafter, and sent an extra copy to Maggie. "We started corresponding, and I visited her a few times," Don said. "[Our relationship] just kind of grew out of that."

One of their visits took place at the 1960 PittCon. "We got together at the banquet at the [convention] ... and we talked with Hal Lynch and Will J. Jenkins. And we were talking about *comics*," Don remembered. "We had not seen *Xero*, which was being distributed at the convention. We didn't meet [the Lupoffs] until later. We said, 'There ought to be a fanzine about comics.'"

Shortly thereafter, Hal Lynch corroborated this encounter with the Thompsons in the pages of *Xero*. "At

the PittCon I met up with Don Thompson, who told me of his desire to start a comics fandom."¹⁰

While Don and Maggie were contemplating the idea of a comic fanzine of their own, the Lupoffs published *Xero* #2 (November 1960) and #3 (January 1961) in quick succession.

The second installment of AICFAD was "The Spawn of M. C. Gaines" by Ted White. White began by discussing his devotion to collecting comics in the late 1940s and early 1950s, many which he had retained.

"Comic books fascinate me," Ted wrote. "The way they were produced, the artists involved, the histories of the companies ... all this fascinates me."¹¹ With that, White filled the next ten pages with an essential lesson in the history of DC Comics, beginning with an introduction to M. C. Gaines, who he dubbed "The Father of Modern Comic Books."

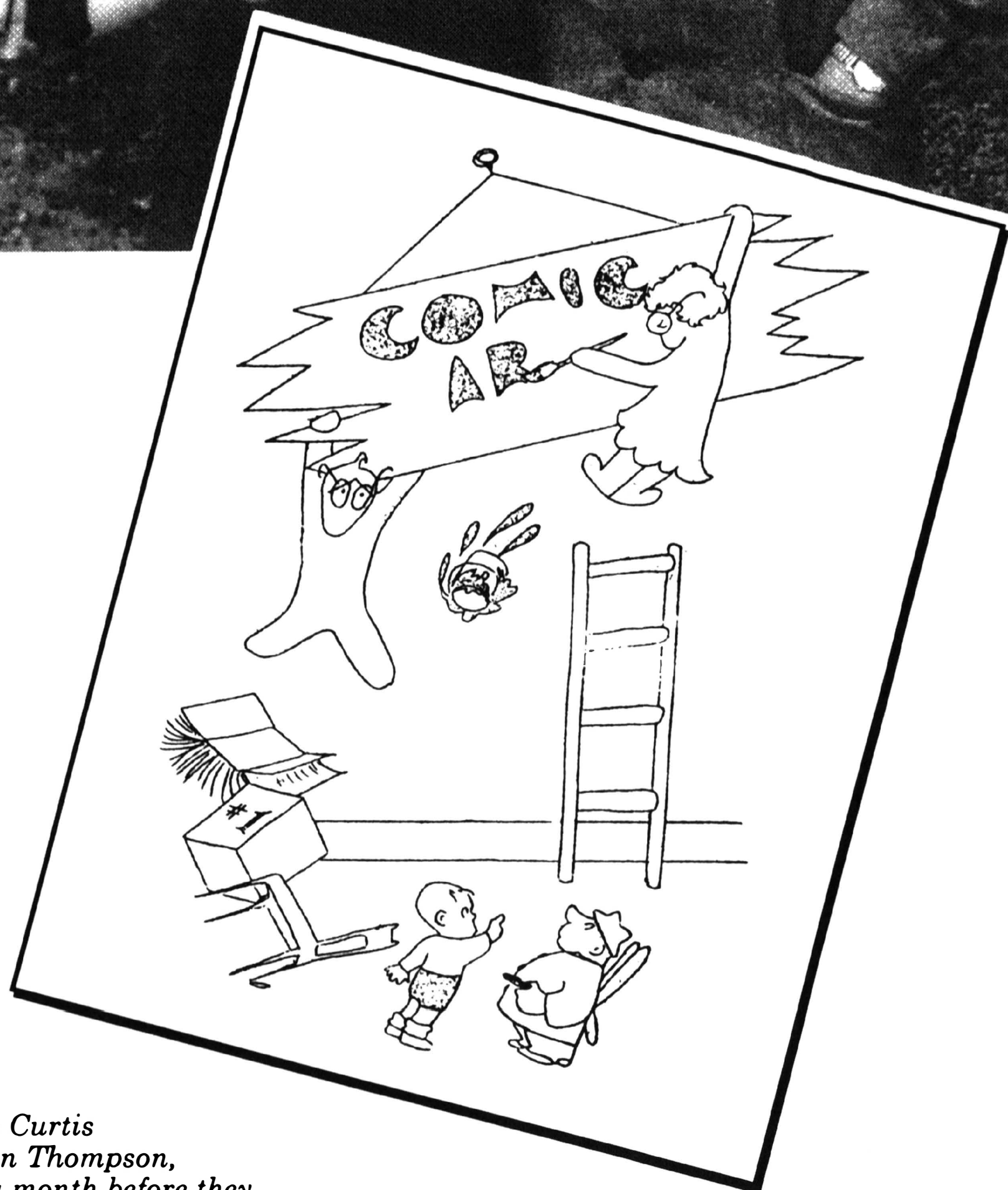
In their third issue, the Lupoffs ran *four* comics-related pieces, plus a cover featuring a gorgeous Justice Society tracing by Sylvia White. It's no wonder that the fanzine's title that issue read "*Xero Comics*."

Dick wrote three pages of additions and corrections to "The Big Red Cheese" in "Shaz-urk!" (a reference to the sound Billy Batson would make when he was gagged just before he could summon Captain Marvel); Otto Binder contributed "At Home with the Marvels," a response to AICFAD, in which he pointed out that it was Bill Parker and C. C. Beck who invented Dr. Sivana, among other clarifications; and Ted White appended four pages in the form of "Son of the Spawn of M. C. Gaines" with further thoughts on the DC/National line.

But the headline feature of *Xero Comics* was Jim Harmon's excellent AICFAD entry, "A Bunch of Swell Guys," which tackles the history of the Justice Society of America in some detail. The title derives from a line by Johnny Thunder in an early JSA adventure. According to Harmon, the *guys* were all pretty *swell*—but he expressed some reservations about Wonder Woman.

"*Superficially* Wonder Woman is an Amazon who fell in love with a felled aviator, Steve Trevor," Harmon wrote, "But *underneath*, I am seriously convinced that the strip was bondage fetish [sic], perhaps lesbian pornography. The same

PHOTO BY RON HARDIN



Maggie Curtis and Don Thompson, about a month before they were married.

Comic Art #1 was conceived at the 1960 World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh, before Don and Maggie saw Xero.

HARBINGER

Editor: Don Thompson

#1

Art Editor: Maggie Curtis

situations, even the same style of drawing, can be found in these early comics and in the high-priced under-the-counter items today." After citing various (now familiar) situations in the comic book to support this thesis, he stated, "I strongly suspect [creator William Moulton Marsden] and his artist, H. G. Peter, of unusual sexual tastes."¹²

The ending of "A Bunch of Swell Guys" (which harkens back to his *Peon* article) held special poignancy for those who continue to appreciate the comic book medium into adulthood. "The Biblical idea of 'putting away childish things' has little appeal to me; it smacks of a rather snide and vainglorious pride in mere chronology. It demands a relinquishment of all naiveté, all simplicity, all appreciation of simple pleasures. It demands the smothering of that old science-fiction idea, the Sense of Wonder.

"Perhaps the highest form of sophistication is not to emphasize but to admit whatever genuine quality of innocence is still within you."

The same January that *Xero* #3 was issued, another early comics zine with the unlikely title of *Plague* appeared, probably inspired by *Xero*. The lone issue of *Plague* was edited and published by Jiro Tomiyama, a member of the West Coast Zine group. [See Chapter 3] It featured a nicely drawn wrap-around two-color photo offset cover by Tomiyama, and an expertly printed ditto interior. The highlight of its thirty pages was an excellent article, "The Downfall Of Comics," by Mike Deckinger (who had already contributed to *Xero*). Deckinger's piece was a burlesque of the attack on comics by Dr. Fredric Wertham, here characterized as "Dr. Fredrick Worthless, who had bribed a University into awarding him a degree." Also in this issue was an article on the upcoming *Dondi* movie, a bio of Walt Kelly and a piece on *The Flintstones* TV show. In fact, the only non-comics article was an Earl Noe article on juvenile delinquency called "I Was a Teenage Nazi." *Plague* did not lead anywhere, but it is an interesting footnote, and an example

of a virtually all-comics fanzine produced for sf fans.

January 1961 was quite a month for the emergence of comics-oriented fanzine material. Not only did *Xero* #3 and *Plague* #1 see print, but Don Thompson and Maggie Curtis sent out about fifty copies of a little one-sheet called *Harbinger*, a request for material for their projected fanzine about comics.

In the autumn after the PittCon, Maggie had begun her freshman year at Oberlin College, and Don found a job with *The Cleveland Press*. *Harbinger*, which presaged their fanzine *Comic Art*, was printed on a mimeograph machine at Oberlin College.

Comic Art saw the light of day in March or April. (There is no record of the exact publication date.) Don Thompson called it "a science fiction fanzine about comics."

Maggie remembered, "By the time we did the first issue, we were friends with Dick and Pat Lupoff. We started corresponding. Bill Thailing, I think, gave us a copy of *Xero* #1. And of course they knew people in science fiction fandom who were also into comic books, and we grew into that whole science fiction thread." In fact, much of the first issue of *Comic Art* was devoted to Dick Lupoff's article "Re-Birth," about the resurgence of interest in comics and the move to create a "general comics fandom."

In "Re-Birth," Lupoff wrote: "[AICFAD] has been the most letter-provoking feature of *Xero*.... All of this activity means something, and unless I'm one very lousy inducer, it means that there is a great amount of interest in comic books, that it has been rolling along, usually unpublicized, showing through only occasionally in science fiction fandom and other peripheral areas of activity. Now maybe Charles Fort would say that the fall of 1960 was comic book time and that first article in *Xero* had nothing to do with the revival of interest. Certainly I would not claim that 'The Big Red Cheese' created the interest. But I do believe that the article served as a catalyst for all the latent interest which had

been trying so long to break through to the surface."¹³

Dick Lupoff was right: there was a lot of interest in comics, and it had been "rolling along, usually unpublicized." It had expressed itself in the pages of the EC and satire fanzines. And *Xero* and *Comic Art* helped focus the interest of the double-fans at the dawn of a new decade.

But comic books themselves were going through their own resurgence at this time, and it took a college professor in Detroit, Michigan, who was strictly a comic fan, to really get the ball rolling.

That man was Jerry Bails.

Footnotes - Chapter 1

Quotes without footnotes are taken from interviews and letters to the author between 1991 and 1998.

¹Malcolm Willits, "Gottfredson and Me," *The Malcolm Willits Collection of Mickey Mouse Paintings by Floyd Gottfredson*, March 1993.

²Ted White, "Forgotten Worlds," *Comic Art* #5, October 1964.

³Ted White, letter to the editor (John Benson), *Squa Tront* #9, 1983.

⁴Ralph Reese, *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Science Fiction Society* #13, March 30, 1952, edited by Harlan Ellison. In the fanzine, unclear printing makes it difficult to be certain of the author's last name. It is either "Reese" or "Beese." If "Reese," it isn't the same Ralph Reese who worked as an assistant to Wally Wood in the 1960s.

⁵James V. Taurasi, "The EC Twins," *Fantasy-Comics* #1, September-October, 1952.

⁶Ivie eventually worked for *Castle of Frankenstein* and published *Monsters and Heroes*, his own black and white magazine, in the mid-1960s.

⁷Joe Sarno, "Chicago Comics Fandom: A History," 1978.

⁸Jim Harmon, "Harmony," *Peon* #38, December 1956.

⁹Dick Lupoff, "The Big Red Cheese," All In Color For A Dime, *Xero* #1, September 1960.

¹⁰Hal Lynch, letter, *Xero* #2, November 1960.

¹¹Ted White, "The Spawn of M. C. Gaines," All In Color For A Dime, Part 2, *Xero* #2, November 1960.

¹²Jim Harmon, "A Bunch of Swell Guys," All In Color For A Dime, Part 3, *Xero* #3, January 1961.

¹³Dick Lupoff, "Re-Birth," *Comic Art* #1, April 1961.

2

The Birth of *Alter-Ego*

As a result of the imposition of the Comics Code Authority, only three hundred comic book titles were printed in 1955, as opposed to six hundred the previous year. A number of publishers closed their doors, and the survivors began casting about for new ideas.

Although the attempts of Timely/Atlas to revive Captain America, Human Torch and Sub-Mariner as commie fighters in 1953 hadn't worked, the field was now considerably thinner, and the decision-makers at National Periodical Publications (now DC Comics) decided that the time had come for them to test the waters with their own revival.

Their innovative *Showcase* title was designed for such try-outs, and it was during a session where the editors discussed various ideas that "someone, some unknown inspirational genius, suggested that we bring back the Flash," Julius Schwartz recounted. "We decided not to revive the old Flash from the forties, but to modernize him."¹ Schwartz had been on the

editorial staff of DC (beginning in the All-American branch) since 1944, and was now about to launch what would become the Second Heroic Age of Comics.

Yet "Presenting the Flash" in *Showcase* #4 was an exceedingly tentative feeler; the follow-up didn't appear until *Showcase* #8, some months later. Then Schwartz waited almost a year to produce the third and fourth try-outs, in *Showcase* #13 and #14.

With this kind of sporadic publishing, it's not surprising that the first two sallies were missed by a Math graduate student who had been dreaming of a return of the Flash and the rest of the heroes of his youth.

Jerry Gwin Bails had been yearning for a return of the Justice Society of America since *All-Star* became *All-Star Western* in early 1951 and the JSA was relegated to comic book limbo. He was a tireless fan of the JSA, no doubt because he encountered them at an early age on a newsstand in Kansas City, Missouri, when he was growing up.

Born on June 26, 1933, his earliest recollection of comics was marveling at the covers hanging by bulldog clips in the window of his favorite shop that sold comics. It was a dry goods store across the street from what would become his father's pool hall.

"In early 1941, the Great Depression was just ending, and families were finally beginning to come into some disposable income," Jerry said in a recent interview. "This translated down to seven-year-olds as a weekly allowance—a quarter as I recall. I was free for the first time to spend it as I chose. It went for comics first and foremost.

"One of the earliest covers I recall from my youth was on *Flash Comics* #20, where the Flash was hurling a crook onto overhead telephone lines," Bails remembered. "That issue was dated August 1941. At almost exactly the same time, I spotted *All-Star Comics* #6. It marked the very first time I would witness the Justice Society of America, starring all my favorite heroes teaming up in a book-length

adventure. That comic book had the most profound long-term effect on me. Spotting the covers of #6 and #7 were ecstatic moments for me. I can still feel a rush of endorphins just recalling the covers."

Jerry had two brothers, Joe and Jack. "It was the existence of two younger brothers for whom I had considerable care and responsibility that got me into telling stories, drawing pictures for them and practicing at being a teacher," he recalled. "When I had polio at ten, I talked Joe into taking swimming lessons with me by agreeing to tell him Batman stories on the long walk to the library where the pool was located."

Though Bails had spent the last several years obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from the University of Kansas City, and then going for a Masters in Math, he had corresponded with Gardner Fox starting in 1953 regarding the JSA, and worked steadily toward re-building his personal collection of *All-Star*. "Gardner Fox was a most generous and compassionate man and it is clear to me that he had influenced my basic values through the vehicle of the Justice Society," Jerry said. "He made a big difference to me."

When he finally noticed the Flash revival in *Showcase* #13 around January of 1958, he was twenty-four years old and deeply immersed in his studies. But the sight of that comic book on the stands struck him like a thunderbolt, for it implied the possibility of further revivals—even his beloved JSA.

Bails unleashed a flurry of letters, with renewed energy, at Fox and Schwartz. In January 1959, he and Fox worked out a deal for the writer's bound editions of *All-Star*, and Jerry's JSA collection was complete.²

From the time he saw *Showcase* #13, Bails had to wait nearly two years for the day to arrive when the

JSA was back in its new incarnation: The Justice League of America. *Brave and Bold* #28 hit the newsstands at the very end of 1959. Of course, he had other things on his mind, like completing his doctorate in Natural Science. Around the time Jerry G. Bails, Ph.D. (with his wife, Sondra) had moved to Detroit to take his new post as Assistant Professor of Natural Science at Wayne State University, *JLA* #1 appeared, and Bails was thinking of ways to support and encourage this exciting development. (In that issue, Schwartz indicated that further hero revivals were probable.)

Then, another spark-plug fell into place, and that was Roy Thomas, an English and history major in his senior year at Southeast Missouri State College in Cape Girardeau, about a hundred miles south of St. Louis on the Mississippi River.

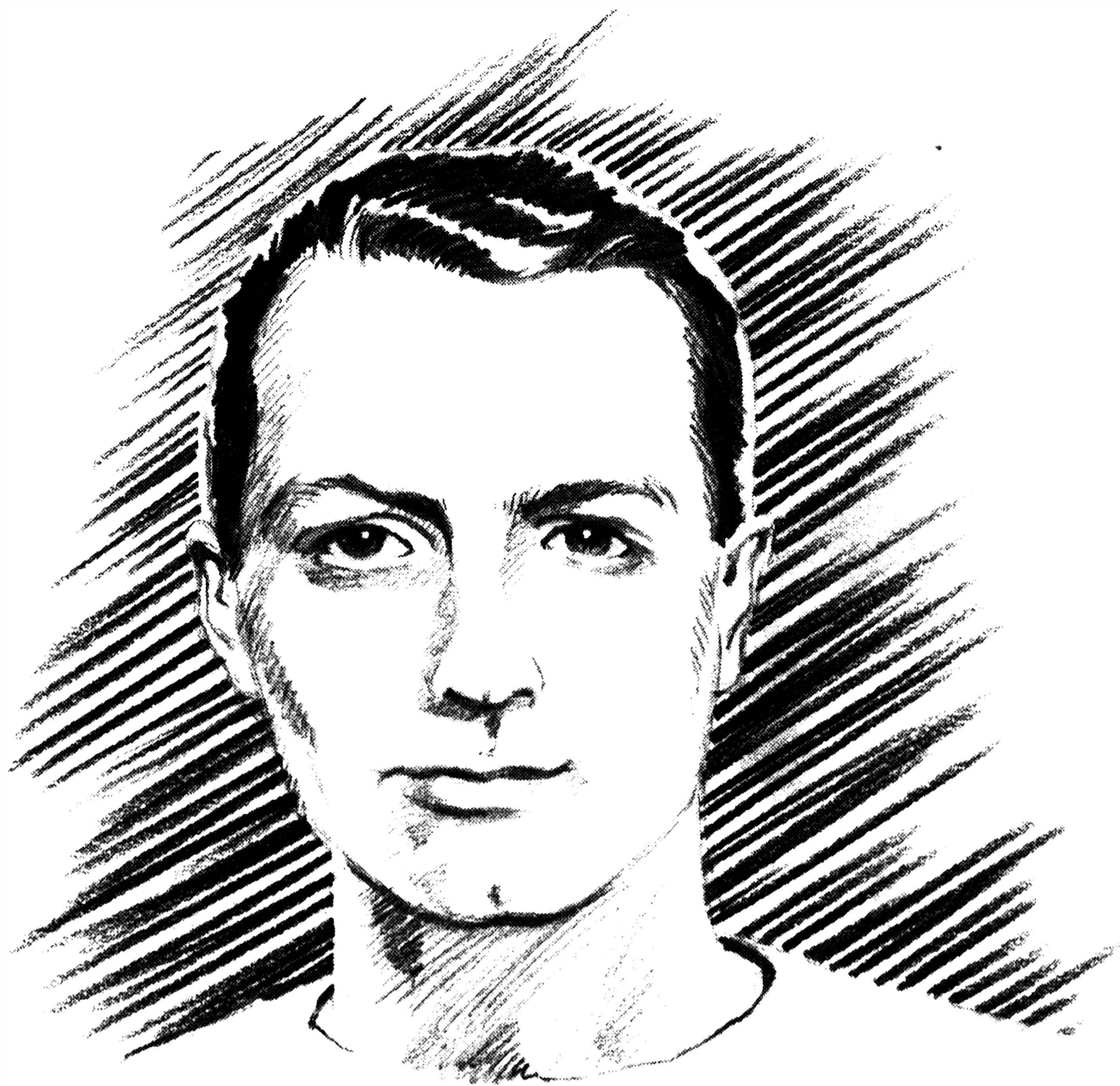
Thomas, though several years younger than Bails, had learned to read in the pages of *All-Star*, and was so taken with the "new JSA" that he'd written his first letter to editor Julius Schwartz. (In an earlier contact with DC, a youthful Thomas had been informed that trading and selling old comics could not be officially sanctioned by the company, for it might spread disease.)

This time, when Roy inquired about obtaining back issues of *All-Star*, Schwartz gave him Gardner Fox's name and address. Fox in turn referred Roy to Jerry Bails, informing the Missourian that Jerry had recently purchased all his back issues. Roy was disappointed, but immediately dashed off a letter to "Mr. Bails" on November 21, 1960, the day before his twentieth birthday.

Just five days later, he had his reply. "I can't tell you how happy I am to find another *All-Star* enthusiast after all these years," Jerry wrote. "In



The coming of the re-tooled Justice Society of America, to be known as the Justice League of America, energized Jerry Bails to start a publication—initially conceived to boost the revival of his favorite super hero team.



Jerry Bails

1945, I began my campaign to collect all the back issues of this magazine, and in 1951, when the JSA was dropped, I began my campaign for the revival of this old favorite. Just last year, as you know, my efforts finally paid off. Now, I'm off on a new campaign—to make the Justice League of America more popular than Superman. First, I want to see the *JLA* published monthly; then I want to see it published in a giant edition. I hope you will join me in working for these goals."³ Along with the letter, Jerry sent dog-eared copies of *All-Star* #4 through 6, the first Roy had ever seen of them. This generosity on Bails' part cemented their friendship.

Thomas and Bails began a long and voluminous correspondence, each writing two or three letters a week to the other, with queries and responses often crossing in the mail. Their letters were filled with trading proposals and comments about recent acquisitions from the few sources available to them.

"We both bombarded DC with scores of letters," Bails recalled years later. "*JLA* #4 is filled with letters from me under different pen names. Don't blame Julie for this. I did everything I could to fool him, including mailing the letters from all across the country."

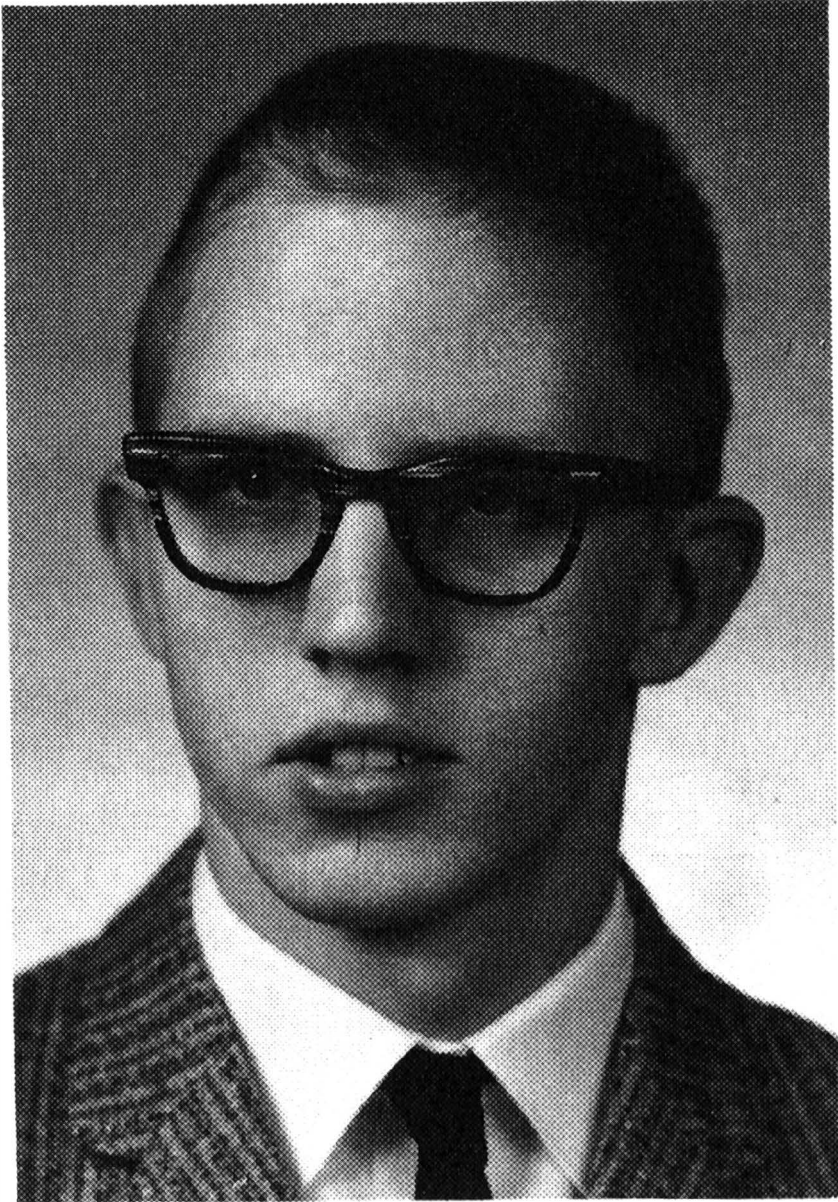
Jerry revealed that he had suggested to Gardner Fox (in a letter dated August 29, 1960) that a revival of the Atom would be the next logical step after Hawkman, who was slated to make his debut in December. Gardner passed this letter on to Julie, who published all but the Atom suggestion in the letter

column in *JLA* #3. He and Roy set about concocting a concept for the new Atom, which they planned to submit to Schwartz. (Jerry envisioned a new, more Dollman-like Atom.)

Bails put the outlines of their suggestions in a letter to Schwartz on December 8th, which reads in part: "A brilliant young experimenter [Al Pratt, a physics professor in ordinary life] discovers how to compress the atoms of his body to make himself only six inches tall. In this meta-stable state, the mighty mite has the power to leap great distances and to smash through ordinary matter in his battle against crime, but he can only safely remain in this miniature form for one hour."

Schwartz wrote back on January 6, 1961, "Many thanks for your ideas on the Atom revival, but by a fantastic coincidence I had already had some similar ideas on the same subject; even went so far as to have artist Gil Kane do some sketches." Both Bails and Thomas believed, with some justification, that their enthusiastic letters and suggestions played a part in DC's decision to revive the Atom.⁴ Bails urged Thomas to consider revival ideas for Dr. Fate.

In that same letter, he mentioned (for the first time) that he was thinking about publishing a "*JLA* newsletter" that he would distribute to contacts made through the letter pages in Julie's comics. Schwartz had decided, toward the end of 1960, to begin running complete addresses in his letter columns. Full addresses appeared in *Brave and Bold* #35 (May 1961)



Roy Thomas
ca. 1960

with pre-publication comments on the Hawkman revival from Jerry, Roy and others.

Now fate intervened to bring Jerry Bails and Julie Schwartz face-to-face. Near the end of January, Bails was invited to visit and lecture at Adelphi College on Long Island the following month. Jerry and Sondra decided to make the visit the occasion of a long-awaited holiday, and he scheduled a visit to the DC offices. "I am going to suggest my plan for a *JLA* newsletter and see if I can get their support for it."³

A few days later, in a letter to Roy, Jerry wrote, "My thoughts for a newsletter are still pretty muddy. I can have the thing hectographed for nothing, but I would prefer to at least have it mimeographed, [and] that

costs money. So does postage if the number of copies is very great. I don't want to charge for it, because that involves all sorts of complications and DC might not give their approval, and their approval is essential if I am to get the kind of advance info I need for a good sheet.

"Right now I think I'll send *The JLA-Subscriber* (as I might call it) only to adult readers who write in to one of Julie's magazines," Jerry continued. "This audience would supply many new ideas and help to boost the *JLA* with the younger set. They would also be interested in gossip about old JSA stories and other DC comics, and might want to trade old mags, just as we have.

"The number of *JLA* fans over 18 shouldn't be so great that I couldn't afford the postage myself, and perhaps different issues of the newsletter could originate from different fans. In other words, any one at any time might get a newsletter off to other fans. What do you think? I think that each editor might include an editorial. I have one I want to write on the good and bad effects of the Comics Code. And I'm sure you could write many interesting features."³

It's fascinating to see the workings of Bails' mind. Jerry may have had some indirect awareness of sf fandom at this point (for there are indications that he advertised for comics in *The Fantasy Collector* as early as 1959), but if he did, it was obviously vague and incomplete. His candid letters to Roy Thomas certainly reveal no knowledge of the workings of sf fandom and fanzines.

In fact, Bails was very close to conceiving of a "fandom" on his own. The idea of various editors

putting out their own newsletter is just another way of envisioning different fanzines being published. Yet, these thoughts were very embryonic, for he and Roy had no idea how large a potential readership an amateur publication on comic book heroes would have. They were still operating in semi-isolation. Would a newsletter meet with indifference?

Jerry and Sondra saw the Broadway shows "Camelot" and "An Evening with Mike Nichols and Elaine May," and various other big-city sights, and of course he gave his lecture, but undoubtedly the highlight of the trip was his visit to DC. When Bails broached the subject of a *JLA* newsletter to Julie Schwartz, he received an entirely positive response, for such amateur publications were well-known to Julie. With his amateur publishing background, Schwartz may have seen Jerry and Roy as something of successors or counterparts to himself and Mort Weisinger, in terms of their fannish pursuits. (Weisinger, of course, was then editor of the Superman family of comics.) Certainly Schwartz was impressed with Jerry's academic credentials. All this came into play in helping Bails receive Julie's approbation.

It was Julie who told Jerry that amateur magazines and newsletters were called *fanzines*. (The credit for coining the terms "fanzine" and "prozine" goes to sf fan Louis Russell Chauvenet, who first used the words in print around 1941.) "Julie had shown me copies of ... *Xero*, which was running a series on the old comics," Bails later wrote. "I was happy to learn that there was a segment of science-fiction fandom that was devoted to the old comic-book heroes."⁵

Bails' visit with Schwartz in mid-February kicked his publishing plans into high gear. He returned to Detroit loaded with information about upcoming DC comics, fairly bursting with energy and enthusiasm.

He wrote to Roy: "My five-hour visit to the DC offices, my luncheon with Julie and Gar, my private conversations with writers and artists, and my perusal of AA

Dear Editor:

Inasmuch as your office can't supply back-numbers of your various SUPERMAN magazines, would it be possible for you to print my address so that readers who have old issues can swap or sell them to me? —Jack Darrell, Chicago, Ill.

(Sorry, but old issues of used magazines are known disease-carriers, so we can't encourage such swapping.—Ed.)

Excerpt from *Metropolis Mailbag*, Superman #135 (1960)

Continued on 3rd page following



As this second issue of *Hawkman* goes to press a month before the first issue is due to appear on the newsstands, there has been no opportunity for readers to send in their comments on the magazine. However, we came up with the idea of sending advance proofs of the initial *Hawkman* to a select group of readers who have favored us with fine critical letters in the past—asking them for their reaction to the issue. The letters of these honored guest critics follow:

In my judgment you've struck paydirt with your experimental feature *Hawkman*. It is superior in so many ways to other adventure-hero features. For one thing, the marriage of the hero and the heroine is refreshingly novel; it is bound to provide many new and interesting situations. For another thing, the special use that *Hawkman* makes of ancient weapons marks him as the most unique hero in a long time.

Without a doubt, author Gardner Fox has created for this new series some of the most intriguing characters in the history of comics. I hope that he will continue to weave all of these characters, and especially Mavis Trent, into future *Hawkman* stories. I hope too that he will relate some of the adventures of the *Winged Warriors* on their home planet of *Thanagar*.

Also, let me say that there could have been no better selection of an artist for *Hawkman* than Joe Kubert. His drawings are superb.

I am looking forward not only to the appearance of *Hawkman* in a regular magazine of his own, but also to his guest appearance in the all-star magazine, *Justice League of America*.

Jerry G. Bails
14242 Dale, Detroit 23, Mich.

Well, you've done it again! For the third time now, you've re-introduced a character to today's reading public which had been at one time a popular feature of DC Comics in the past. First, you came out with the new *Flash*; then followed that up with the new *Green Lantern*; and, now, look who's with us once more: *Hawkman*!

This character has got to hit again! You've brought us an up-to-date hero who has been a

"friend" of ours in years gone by. I like what you've done with *Hawkman* and his *Hawkgirl*. Even for this year of 1960, they are both two entirely "new" and different characters, unlike any others which are currently on the newsstands. The fans, as far as I'm concerned, have got to take this guy to their hearts, as they did when he was first introduced way back in the early '40's.

As far as the story "Creature of a Thousand Shapes" is concerned, I didn't care too much for it. The layout on the story was exceptionally well done, as was the artwork. The story idea, in itself, could have been better but it became hammed up too much. Everybody in comics these days is fighting off outer-space creatures! Is there no end in sight? Must every menace be from outer space?

I for one certainly hope to see *Hawkman* and *Hawkgirl* in a lot more comics, even one of their own in the not too distant future. I think that they've got a bright future ahead of them if they are editorially handled properly. There's no reason in the world (or out of it, for that matter) why *Hawkman* shouldn't become one of the most popular comic features again. His new, up-to-date version is great; thanks to Gardner Fox and Joe Kubert. And, while we're on the subject of names, how 'bout keeping the author and writer's name on the title page of each story? Quite a large amount of fans like to know who's behind the characters. Good hunting!

Ron Haydock,
607 E. Washington, Santa Ana, Cal.

I was a *Hawkman* reader for several years and he was (and still is) my favorite comic character, so I would naturally have a lot to say concerning this revised version of him.

Taking first things first, I think that the story and the artwork were generally excellent, and Mr. Fox and Mr. Kubert certainly deserved the recognition they received on the first page. This pilot issue of *Hawkman* was, in my opinion, far superior to the first trial issues of my other two favorite magazines, *Justice League of America* and *Green Lantern*, though these were also good. If it improves as much as they have since then, *Hawkman* will be my favorite DC comic.

I'm glad you have changed the characters physically as little as you did, for little improvement could have been made. *Hawkgirl's* stylized mask is especially good. One complaint, however, which I feel duty-bound to make as my chief (and practically only) disappointment in the issue—I think that *Hawkman's* mask greatly needs some wings. I sincerely hope that if the comic comes out on a regular basis, you will either keep the same mask and add some flaring wings as in the original version or will give him a stylized mask somewhat similar to that of *Hawkgirl*. As it is, he looks a bit plain and bald beside her. The best picture of *Hawkman's* mask is the one on page 5, panel 4, where the beak is shorter and more curved than in most other pictures. Here it looks more like a hawk than on some other pages. This physical appearance, I think, is important in *Hawkman* even more than in most comics, as the *Winged Wonder's* dramatic appearance was always one of his major attractions as a character.

And, in this connection, I consider the cover of *Brave and Bold* No. 34 about the best cover which I have ever seen on a comic. The maces add a lot to this, and I sincerely hope that they, though used little in this issue, will become the chief weapon of the two feathered furies against crime.

As far as I know they are the first husband-and-wife team in comics, and I like the idea. I certainly hope, by the way, that Shayera's hair is red. (*Editor's note: the proofs sent to our guest critics were uncolored.*) I don't know why, but Joe Kubert's girls always look best with red hair.

Your origin story was truly unusual and interesting, but I hope that in future issues the science-fiction angle is played down, as I find it hard to picture *Hawkman* fighting crime with ray guns, etc. I hope that in the third and last of the *Brave and Bold-Hawkman* issues you send the spaceship back to *Thanagar* and have the two crime-fighters decide to make earth their home.

In conclusion, I hope that your great new *Hawkman* comic runs a hundred issues or so. Just one parting shot—the first issue that you put some wings on *Hawkman's* mask. I'll buy a subscription!

Roy Thomas.
307 Greensferry Rd., Jackson, Mo.

Thanks for sending the *Hawkman* proofs. They were very interesting, even though uncolored.

Glad to see that Joe Kubert is still around. His artwork has improved over the last fifteen years. I remember when he used to draw *Vigilante* in *Action Comics*, as well as many other comic characters during and shortly after the war.

I can't get used to seeing the new *Hawkman* without blond hair! And though I can't remember the origin of the original *Hawkman* who appeared in early *Flash Comics*. I dislike his present origin. Too complicated. Would rather have seen him lost in the woods as a child, adopted by hawks, and later on vow to fight crime.

The cover scene was great. Would have been

greater if a few dozen cars, and human beings were falling from the monster's jaws. Monsters on covers are certain to attract attention.

One final comment—I'm happy to see *Hawkman* revived after all these years. He should be more successful than *Green Lantern*, and possibly *Flash*. And congratulations to the one who decided to marry *Hawkman* and *Hawkgirl*. This adds an original touch to the entire series.

Ronnie Graham,
Box 923, Berkeley 1, Cal.

Now, as promised in the first *Hawkman's Roost*, we present a capsule autobiography of *Hawkman's* illustrator, Joe Kubert:

Any of you who have read and enjoyed *Hawkman* vintage 1945 can imagine the thrill and satisfaction I derived coming back to the character I drew fifteen years ago! It's like saying hello to an old friend, who, rather than aging during the past years, has grown younger, stronger, and more adventuresome than ever!

For one like myself who learned to draw before he could write, a career dedicated to illustrating comic strips was what I had always wanted. Even while I attended the High School of Music and Art, Harold Foster—artist creator of *Tarzan* and *Prince Valiant*—was held as high in esteem as Michaelangelo. I took advantage of every opportunity to visit publishers after school hours, just to watch the cartoonists work. In this manner, I gained most of the art knowledge I now commit to my drawing. Without the help of wonderfully talented men like Lou Fine, Mort Meskin, Will Eisner, Irv Novick and many others, a young boy of 13 or 14 years could not have hoped for any success at all in this business.

One of the turning points in my career came in the year 1945, when Sheldon Mayer, then editor of *Flash Comics*, gave me the chance to draw the *Hawkman* strip. I was about 18 at the time, and had been in the comic business only 4 or 5 years.

After several years of a happy association with Sheldon Mayer and *Hawkman*, I left for the army. When I was discharged, *Hawkman* had ceased publication, and my endeavors took me elsewhere.

A few months ago, the editor of *Flash*, *Green Lantern*, and *Justice League of America*, comic books that have had a rebirth in a modern magazine market, asked if I would be interested in drawing *Hawkman* again. My answer was a resounding yes!

I believe *Hawkman* will benefit from my experience of two decades in the comic book business. I feel I can apply things I couldn't even visualize 15 years ago. I sincerely hope that the readers will enjoy reading *Hawkman* as much as I will enjoy drawing him. —Joe Kubert

In the next issue, we'll devote this space entirely to letters from you readers. All communications to this department should be sent to HAWKMAN'S ROOST, National Comics, 575 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

[All-American] classics, gives me more than I could relate in a half dozen king-sized letters; and besides, I don't want to steal all my own thunder, because I know now (for sure) that I want to bring out a 'fanzine' devoted to the Great Revival of the costumed heroes.

"I even have what I consider to be a brilliant title and format. It will be called *Alter-ego*. [Small-case "e" at first.] I have enough background info, promise of advance previews, support in Julie's letter columns, and hope for fresh ideas from a guy named Thomas to make this fanzine go, go, go, as Snapper [Carr] might say."³

Jerry immediately sent out dozens of feelers to people like Ronnie Graham and Ron Haydock, whose letters had also appeared in *Brave and Bold* #35. Graham and Haydock had been active in other fandoms, and quickly helped get the word out about *Alter-Ego*. Schwartz had loaned Jerry his copies of the early *Xeros*, and Bails wrote to everyone in the Lupoffs' letter columns. Soon, Jerry reported that he was receiving two or three responses daily. These people would receive the first issue free of charge. From then on copies would sell for 20 cents unless the person had an article, letter or advertisement in it.

By early March, Jerry had outlined tentative contents of the

first issue. He would write the first part in a history of the JSA, and an article on the Comics Code Authority; Roy would contribute his proposed ideas (in a text narrative) for a revival of the Spectre, as well as the first part of a *JLA* parody strip. The issue would also feature ads for the sale and trade of comics, and news of coming events at DC.

In mid-March, Bails changed his mind about one feature planned for *A-E*. He didn't want to duplicate Jim Harmon's AICFAD article on the Justice Society in *Xero* #3. Therefore, he scratched his own general history of the JSA and started over on a related piece.

By March 28th, the masters for *Alter-Ego* #1 were completed; it was printed via a portable spirit duplicator that Jerry had purchased. Copies were in the mails by the end of the month. What would the response be like? Would Julie be favorably impressed by this initial effort? Would the readers? If Bails had any doubts, he was nevertheless charging forward with preparations for a second issue without stopping to catch his breath.

What did the readers receive for their expression of interest? At twenty-two pages, *Alter-Ego* #1 (March 1961) was slim by later

standards, but it had grown considerably from Bails' initial conception.

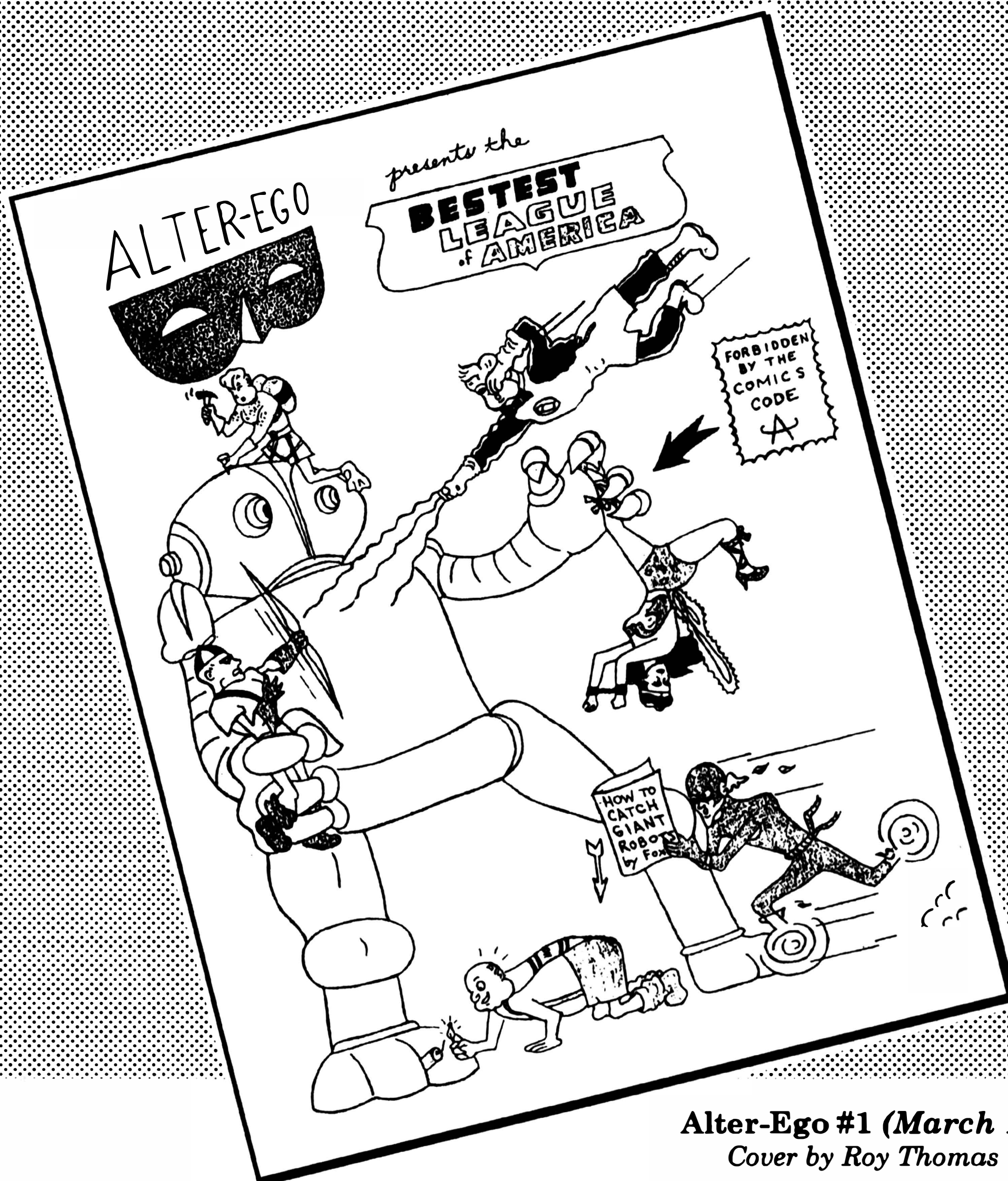
The cover was a multi-colored scene featuring Roy's parody of the *JLA*, known as the Bestest League of America. The formation of the "new Justice Society" had been the energizing factor that inspired Bails to launch *Alter-Ego*, so it was fitting that the first issue was headed-up by this spoof of DC's team of superstars.

Inside, after the contents page was "A Matter of Policy," the brief editorial which announced, "This is the first issue of *Alter-Ego*, a new comic fanzine devoted to the revival of the costumed heroes." From there, Bails launched into four pages of pro news in a feature called "On The Drawing Board." It carried advance word of the forthcoming "Flash of Two Worlds" story (*Flash* #123) which brought back the Golden Age Flash, previews of the upcoming *Batman* and *Secret Origins* annuals (with a cover reproduction of the latter) and hints of the Atom revival slated for *Showcase* #34.

"The Wiles of the Wizard, Portrait of a Villain" was Jerry's two-page substitute for a JSA profile. On pages ten through twelve, Roy Thomas presented the first part of his "Reincarnation of the Spectre," which proposed a new version of the Spectre as a man divided into two characters



Postcard announcement from DC/National in 1960



Alter-Ego #1 (March 1961)
Cover by Roy Thomas

representing good and evil, ego and id: the Spectre and Count Dis.

Instead of the piece on the Comics Code Authority that Jerry had planned, he ran "Merciful Minerva: The Story of Wonder Woman." (Perhaps he felt that criticizing the Comics Code might not be taken well at DC.)

Then, on page 17, the issue was rounded out by the first five-page chapter of "The Bestest League of America" by Thomas. The members of the *BLA* were Wondrous Woman, the Cash, Aquariumman, S'amm S'mith, Lean Arrow and the Green Trashcan. The ostensible leader of the group was the Green Trashcan, whose motto went:

In little shack or circus tent,
No evil shall escape this gent;
Let those who are of evil bent,
Beware my power
—Green Trashcan's scent!

Chapter One centered around the heroes gathering together, and squabbling over who would pair off with Wondrous Woman, Queen of the Glamazons.

That was *A-E* #1: three JSA-related articles, two columns and an amateur comic strip. The layouts were neat, for Sondra Bails had done a careful job on the typing, and the lettering was accomplished with plastic lettering guides. There were two spot illustrations and a couple of small

ads from Jerry and Roy to even out the pages. Much of the printing was done from black ditto masters, which proved to be shorter-running than regular purple ditto masters, thus making the printing rather light on the later copies.

As noted in Chapter One, *Comic Art* #1 from Don Thompson and Maggie Curtis was published about the same time as *A-E* #1. There is some uncertainty about which one came first. The best available information is that *Alter-Ego* preceded *Comic Art* by no more than a month, and possibly as little as a few days. Still, there is little point in splitting hairs,

since the two fanzines played very different roles in the history of comic fandom.

Comic Art and *Xero* were published by double-fans and were read mainly by sf fans who generally had little interest in (or disdain for) new comics, even the Schwartz revivals. The focus of AICFAD was strictly nostalgic. And, by their own admission, the Thompsons' interest was in just about every aspect of comic art *but* the super hero comics of 1961.

Bails had a fiery urgency, an almost messianic fervor, in his effort to support the super hero revivals of the era he dubbed "The Second Heroic Age of Comics." That was, indeed, the stated mission of *Alter-Ego*. As a result, the fanzine had an interesting double-focus. It linked the current super heroes (many of them revivals) with their antecedents (alter-egos, in a sense). With this attention to *both* new and old, *A-E* not only differentiated itself from its predecessors, but established a mix that had something for fans both young and old.

Excitement crackled through its pages, a result of Jerry's almost breathless "what's next?" attitude about upcoming revivals. His enthusiasm was contagious. Yes, the high standards of the writing and lay-out were important to the zine's success. Certainly, timing played a great part, too. But it was Bails' interest in current developments that caused his recruitment efforts to catch fire across the country (and around the world) within a very short time.

This is not to take anything away from the Lupoffs and the Thompsons. *Xero's* "All In Color For A Dime" series continued with well-written, often eloquent tributes to comics of the past. AICFAD put forward baseline facts about each of its topics, which subsequent writers would attempt to enlarge upon. [See Chapter 4 for a rundown of the AICFAD entries in *Xero* #4 - 10.] *Comic Art* printed excellent pieces by Harlan Ellison, Jerry De Fuccio, Larry Ivie, Robert Coulson and many others over the next couple of years.

But it was Jerry Bails who reached out to the names in the letters pages, and those who were mainly comic fans, with a magazine that was decidedly down-to-earth (even a little "gosh-wow," in Ted White's words). It was Bails who wanted to bring as many people into fandom as possible, since it would further the goals of *Alter-Ego*. And it was Bails who frankly had the organizational skill, desire and vision to lay the groundwork for an ongoing comic fandom.

Don and Maggie later wrote, "*Alter-Ego's* editors were trying to get it distributed to the largest possible number of fans—thus *earning* its reputation as a seminal point in comics fandom. We tried, as did Dick and Pat Lupoff with *Xero*, to keep our circulation as small as possible."⁶

Had Jerry Bails not come along when he did, surely someone else would have come up with the idea of a comics fanzine devoted to the resurgence of the super heroes. Jerry himself acknowledged, "Had there been no Jerry or Roy or Don or Maggie, someone else would surely have come up with the idea." In the coming years, one thing became clear: fans with Bails' vision and organizational ability were few and far between.

So great was the impact of *Alter-Ego* #1 that Jerry found himself at the center of a maelstrom of activity. Had he ever seriously questioned whether his efforts

would receive an enthusiastic reception? If so, then the torrent of mail he received in response put all doubts to rest.

Alter-Ego was launched, and all systems were "go." Soon, like stages of a NASA rocket, its various sections would separate, each part becoming a key building block of the new fan movement.

The Golden Age of comic fandom had begun.

Footnotes - Chapter 2

¹Will Jacobs and Gerard Jones, *The Comic Book Heroes*, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1985.

²Gardner Fox had two bound volumes of *All-Star*, consisting of #1 - 12 and #13 - 24. Bails paid \$75.00 for the lot.

³Roy Thomas, "The Alter-Ego Story," unpublished manuscript, written ca. 1964.

⁴The fact that DC included both Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas in their *Fifty Who Made DC Great* booklet celebrating the 50 year anniversary of DC Comics seems to tacitly acknowledge that they influenced Schwartz' thinking about hero revivals.

⁵Jerry Bails, "Out With The Old, In With The New!", *The Comic Reader* #12, August 20, 1962.

⁶Don Thompson and Maggie Thompson, "Fandom's Origins: The Marvel Age of Comics," *Comics Feature*, New Media, 1980.



Splash to the first Bestest League of America strip in *A-E* #1.

3

Out of the Woodwork

Upon laying eyes on Alter-Ego ... I was joyously exuberant, amazed, and profoundly pleased that such a publication existed! An entire publication devoted to comic heroes!! A whole new world was opening up to me. A-E let me know that I wasn't the only individual in the world interested enough in comics to collect them.

Ronn Foss, 1962¹

Ronn Foss was only one of the dozens of old-time comic fans who came out of the woodwork when they saw the early issues of *Alter-Ego*.

Some of them were the double-fans who were well-known in the ranks of sf fandom, but many more were unknown—unless they had a letter printed in a DC or ACG letter column. The US Postal Service reached enthusiasts from across the country and from far-flung continents. They came from all walks of life: mailmen, ambulance attendants, reporters, commercial artists, musicians, businessmen and college students.

Most of them had one thing in common: they weren't the pre-adolescents who had so

disappointed Ted White when *Potrzenie* had gotten its plug in the EC newsletter. Many were in high school, at least, if not considerably older. Some had been collecting since the 1940s. Others had cut their teeth on EC comics. Those older fans brought a mature element into the ranks of this new comic fandom that steadied the ship during the year of its maiden voyage. And they brought special aptitudes and talents that were vital.

Alter-Ego #2 (June 1961) began with another cover by Roy Thomas, depicting a scene of the Spectre and Count Dis from "The Reincarnation of the Spectre - Part 2." Bails contributed an article on the creators behind Hawkman,

and Thomas wrote about the All-Winners Squad from Timely. Part II of "The Bestest League of America" strip by Roy, as well as an editorial, ads and letter column ("Conversations"), rounded out the issue. All but a Hawkman story synopsis by Douglas Marden was from the Bails/Thomas team, unless one counted "On The Drawing Board" news provided by Julie Schwartz, who had been much pleased by the first issue. "It goes without saying that I got a tremendous bang out of it," Schwartz wrote of *A-E* #1 in a letter dated May 4, 1961. "It was well-done, interesting, and attractively presented." That letter went on to provide news of the Atom and other Schwartz-edited comic books.

The third issue of *A-E* (November 1961) was also mainly a dual-effort from the editors. This time, Jerry created a pastiche cover of the Golden Age Green Lantern facing his greatest foes (Solomon Grundy, the Harlequin, et al.) with Doiby Dickles by his side. The bulk of the text was devoted to GL in both his incarnations: Bails (with the help of George Paul) tackled the Alan Scott version, and Thomas handled the Hal Jordan version. A lengthy letter column and the conclusion of "The Bestest League of America" (introducing Wombatman and Superham) made up most of the remainder of the issue. Only a humor piece by Linda Rahm (Roy's girlfriend) and an article on the Captain America movie serial of the 1940s by Ron Haydock were from "outside" contributors. After *A-E* #3 saw print, comicdom was growing at an astounding rate, and there were a host of potential contributors who were both knowledgeable and talented to help Jerry and Roy carry the ball.

Fans desperately needed information about comics of the past, and gave a warm welcome to the well-researched articles by be-spectacled Raymond Miller, a soft-spoken fan living in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania. He had been buying comics starting around 1943, and had saved a stack of about one hundred favorites from the late 1940s. In the early 1950s, he also bought and collected EC comics as they were published.

"Up until 1959, I knew no one else who collected comics," Miller wrote recently. "I knew of no one, outside of newsstands and drugstores, who sold comic books, and they only sold new comics. As each year passed, my collection grew and grew with new issues, never any back issues.

"The first person I corresponded and traded with on a regular basis with was Dean Newman in Bard, California. This was in late 1959 or early 1960. Then, in September 1960, Dean told me about Bill Thailing, and that's when I really started adding old comics to my collection."

By the time Miller caught up to him, Thailing's selling prices generally ran from 25 cents to \$1.50 for a Golden Age comic. Only the *prime* comics before 1943 commanded \$1.75, \$2.00 or higher.

In a letter to Miller dated July 18, 1961, Thailing wrote, "Keep your fingers crossed. Maybe that will help bring in some of the older comics. They sure are getting scarce!! The ones after 1943 are not so hard to find. It's those toughies *before* 1943 that are the ones that never seem to show up." In a list from that same year, he was charging \$3.00 for a copy of *Batman* #1 and \$5.00 for *Dick Tracy Feature Book* #4.

Miller and Thailing constantly traded data about Golden Age comics. "Thank you for the information on the old comic magazine costume characters that you supplied," Bill wrote on December 2, 1960. "Any information that collectors like us can supply each other is indeed helpful. There is nowhere else we can obtain this ... except from one another." Out of his own personal interest, Miller began methodically collating his data, sometimes sharing his lists with others. Ray tirelessly created features like "The Hall of Fame" and "The Information Corner" for early fanzines, tracing hundreds of drawings of well-known and not-so-well-known Golden Age costumed heroes.



Above: *Alter-Ego* #2 (June 1961)

Below: Letter from Bill Thailing to Raymond Miller

Bill Thailing
Box 352 Station D
Cleveland 27, Ohio

February 22, 1961

Hi Ray—

Get your letter a couple days ago. For that dollar I owed you I sent you "Blue Beetle" #6 as requested, which I had dropped to \$1.00. You see, once in a while I have to drop prices to meet competition from professional book-dealers. My "Action Comics" #42 is also a dollar.

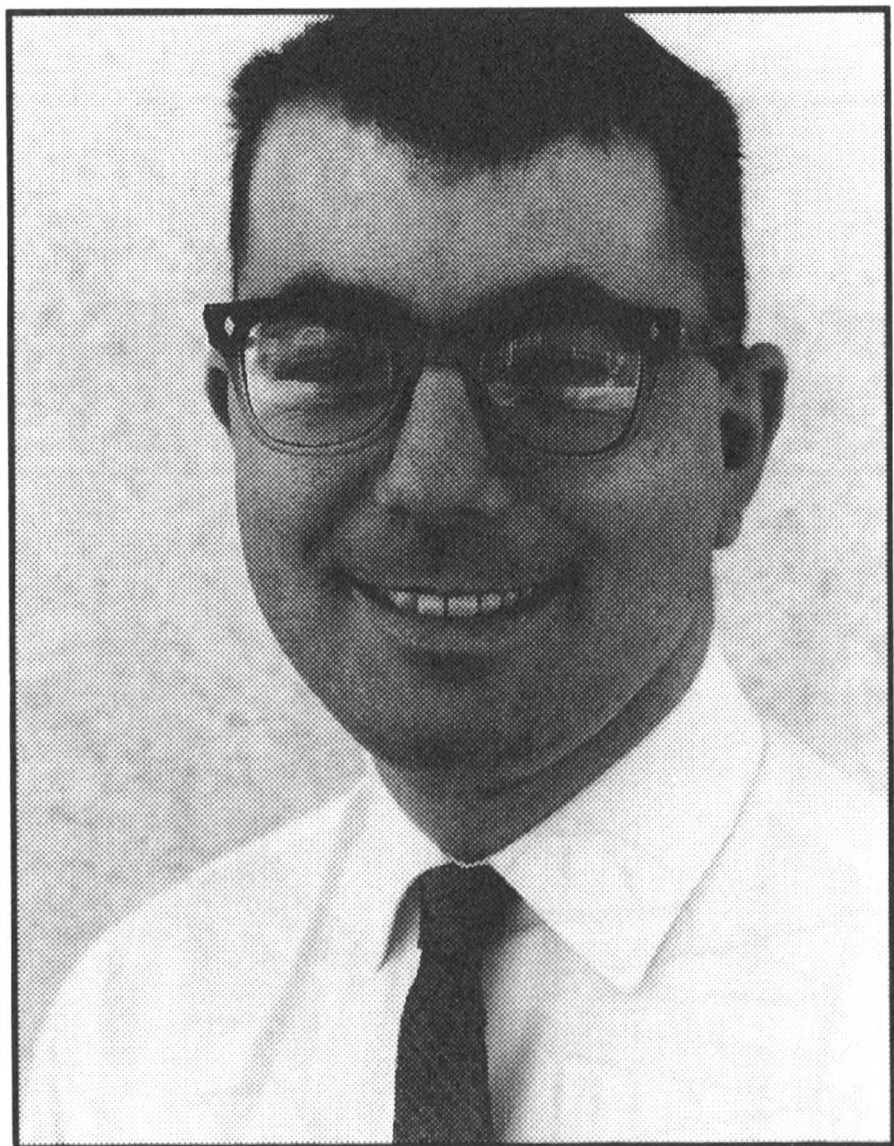
I don't know about any Gene Autry FAWCETT Comics that came out in 1943. I know Dell Publishing Co. brought out an issue late in 1943. This one was Four Color comic #47, and then there was one in 1944 which was the Four Color comic #57. As I say these were both Dell Publications. I know, because I have them. If interested they are priced at 75¢ each. Could be Fawcett had some Autry issues in 1943, but if so, I never saw any of them.

Plastic Man #1 and Phantom Lady #5 have both been sold to orders that I just received yesterday. I can shave the prices a little on the other issues, but I don't care to mention a lot price. I'd rather price them individually. Here are the latest prices:

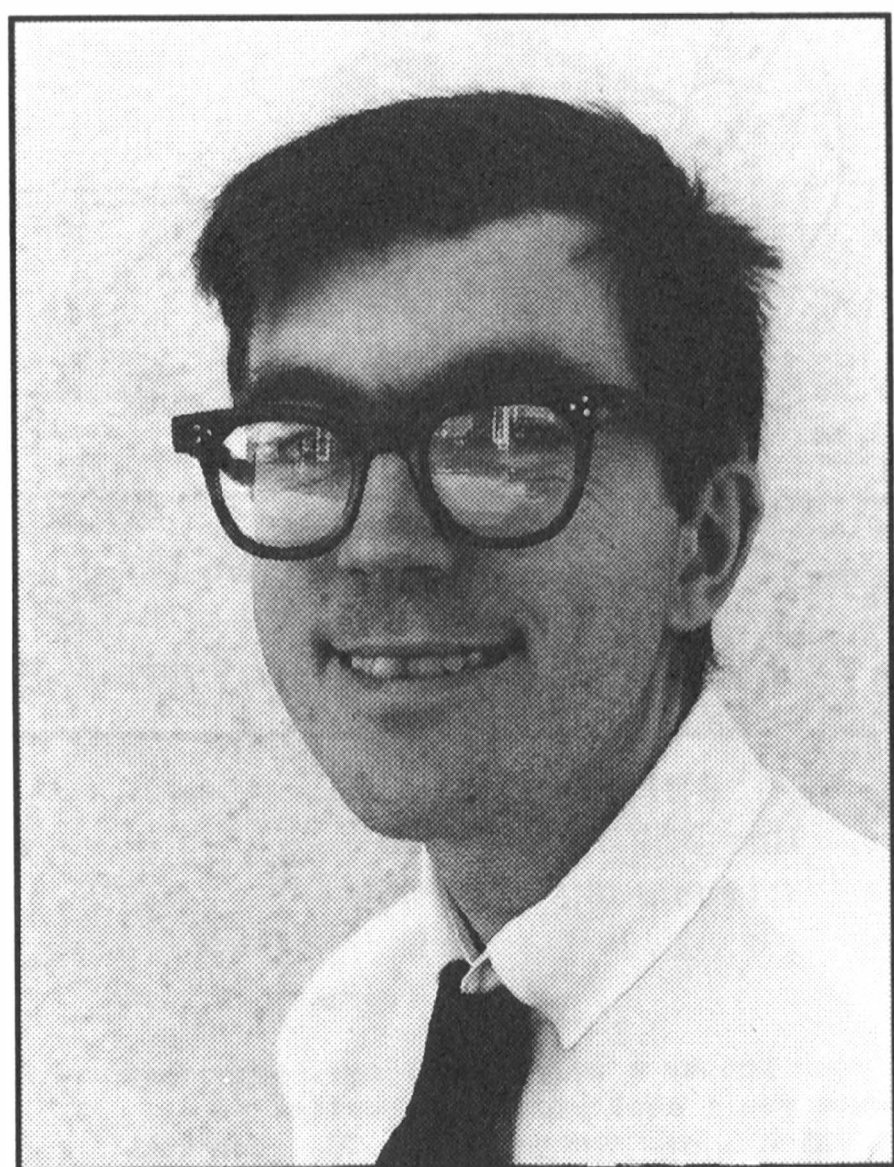
✓ Action Comics #42.....\$1.00 Batman #14.....\$1.00
✓ Captain Marvel, Jr #3.....75¢
✓ Adventure Comics (coverless issues).....75¢ each
Superman #11, 12, 13..... \$1.00 each
Top Notch Comics #2.....\$1.50, #7.....\$1.25
Top Notch Comics #19, and 21.....75¢ each
✓ Captain Marvel Comics #14.....\$1.00 Detective #78..\$1.

If interested in any let me know.

Sincerely yours,
Bill Thailing



John McGeehan



Tom McGeehan

Two fans among the first to step forward were John and Tom McGeehan of Santa Ana, California. The McGeehans had been involved in Edgar Rice Burroughs fandom in the late 1950s, and were among the earliest to hear about *Alter-Ego*. Shoe repairmen by trade, the brothers put their penchant for creating indexes and checklists to good use with their House of Info, a perennial source of data to early collectors. They were well-known to fanzine publishers, for they made it a policy to order multiple copies of *every comic fanzine*. They continued this practice through-out the decade.

One of the most colorful figures who flashed across the fannish landscape was Ron Haydock, a man who had been a rockabilly recording artist as the leader of a group called the Boppers in the late 1950s, best known for the song "99 Chicks." Born in Chicago, he had fashioned himself after Gene Vincent, but broke up the band to get married and move to California. A movie and serial fanatic, he joined up with the WCZ (West Coast Zine) group and published a fanzine called *Ape*.² Soon Haydock branched out with another zine mostly about serials called *Skybird*. He also wrote for Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and edited his own *Fantastic Monsters of the Films*. But early comic fandom knew him best for his "Serialously Speaking" columns in *Alter-Ego* and elsewhere.

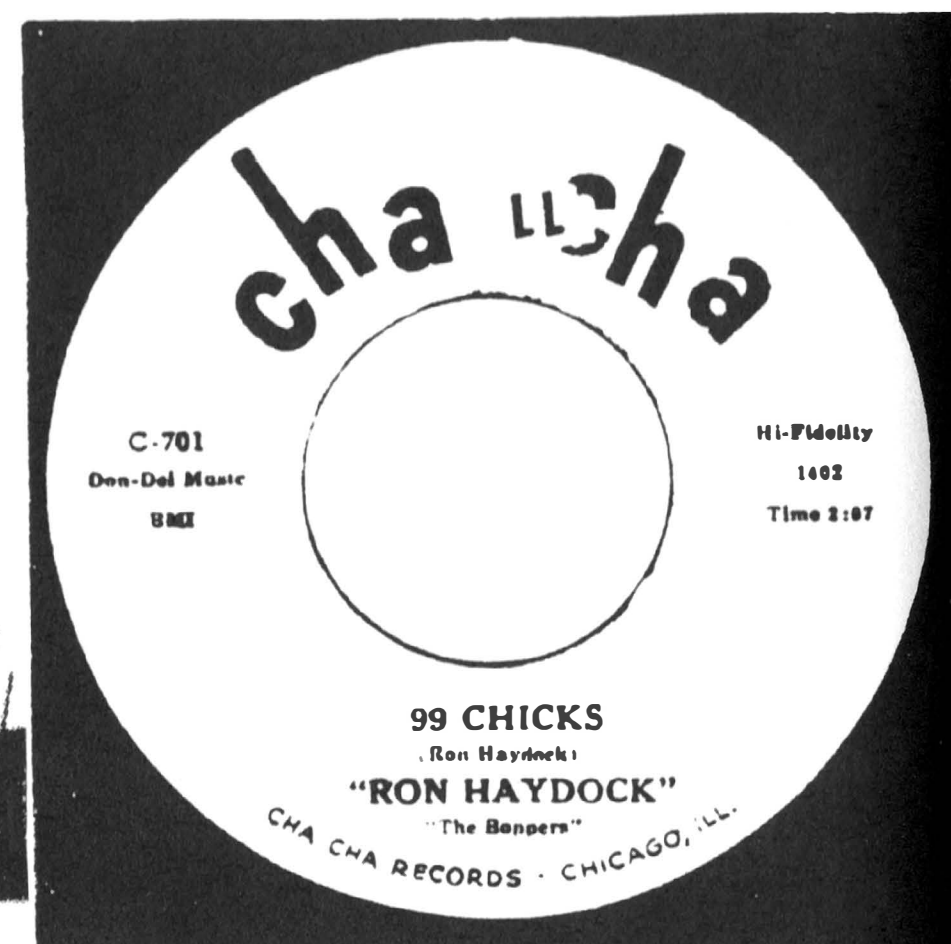


It was Ron Haydock who introduced an artist who would become for a time more admired than many of the pros whose work was being published out of New York: Ronn Foss. Foss was the first artist to gain widespread recognition in comicdom, and certainly one of the best.



RON HAYDOCK 38

Courtesy of
Norton Records



THE COMICCOLLECTOR

No. 1

The Companion to ALTER-EGO

Sept., 1961

A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER - -

The COMICCOLLECTOR is designed as a companion to ALTER-EGO; both are non-profit, amateur fanzines published for the enjoyment of comics fans throughout the English-reading world.

ALTER-EGO is a 30- to 40-page quality zine devoted to articles, features, and stories about the costumed heroes of the comics (past and present). It is published 2 or 3 times a year. Individual copies sell for 30¢ each. No subscriptions are sold.

Born in 1939 in Defiance, Ohio, and having grown up in various Midwestern cities, Ronald Eugene Foss had been drawing his own comics as early as 1949. His favorite artists were Mac Raboy, Al Williamson, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, and of course Joe Kubert, who became his biggest influence. During high school in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, he created hundreds of characters and numerous complete strips, in many genres: costumed hero, western, science fiction and adventure. As a teenager, Foss won art awards and gained visibility doing various forms of art-for-hire in his local community.

Ronn joined the Air Force in 1957 and was sent to Saudi Arabia. There an incident occurred that might have ended his art career before it began. Foss and a roommate were fooling around with a home-made rocket. "I improvised an engine wrapping a lot of layers of aluminum foil around firecracker powder," he recalled in a 1991 interview. "One night we stepped out on to the back porch. I held it in my hands, and my buddy lit a match to it. I felt a thrust of energy, and held on a moment too long ... because the

thing exploded in my hand. We were standing there for a microsecond in a ball of fire. There was a tremendous boom! The foil just ripped to shreds, and mildly cut our faces. We were a pretty bloody couple of guys when the Air Police came to investigate." By an incredible stroke of luck, his hand escaped serious injury.

"In 1958 through 1960, I was stationed at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California, which is forty-five miles from San Francisco," Foss remembered. "I spent lots of my free time in the North Beach area, digging jazz and poetry and more expressive arts than cartooning. I was really caught up in the beatnik scene." He wrote and published his own booklet of beat poetry entitled *Far Gone, Like Lost and Looking Back*.

Foss was introduced to comic fandom with *Alter-Ego* #2, which began his correspondence with Jerry Bails. Bails put him in touch with Ron Haydock, Roy Thomas and others.

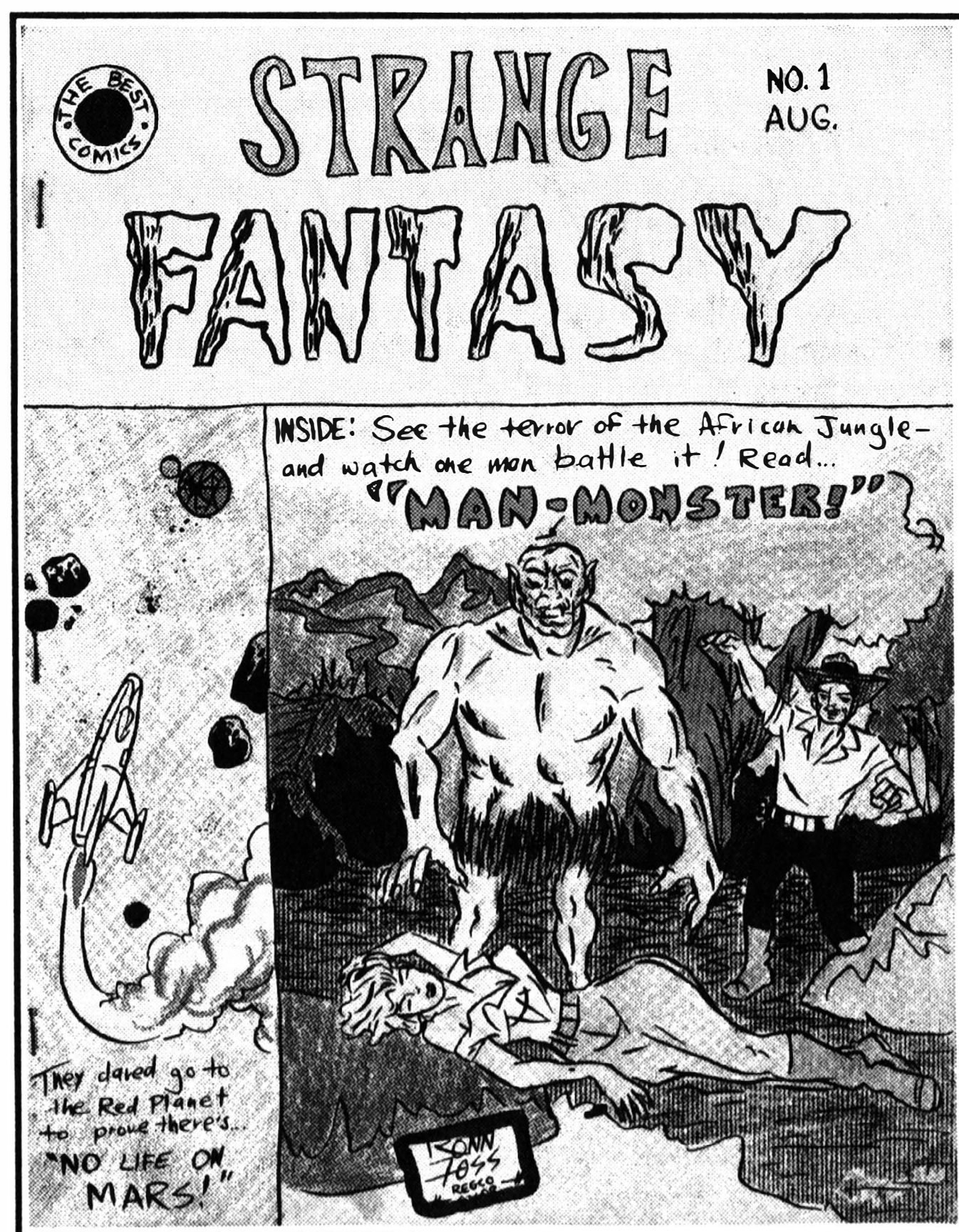
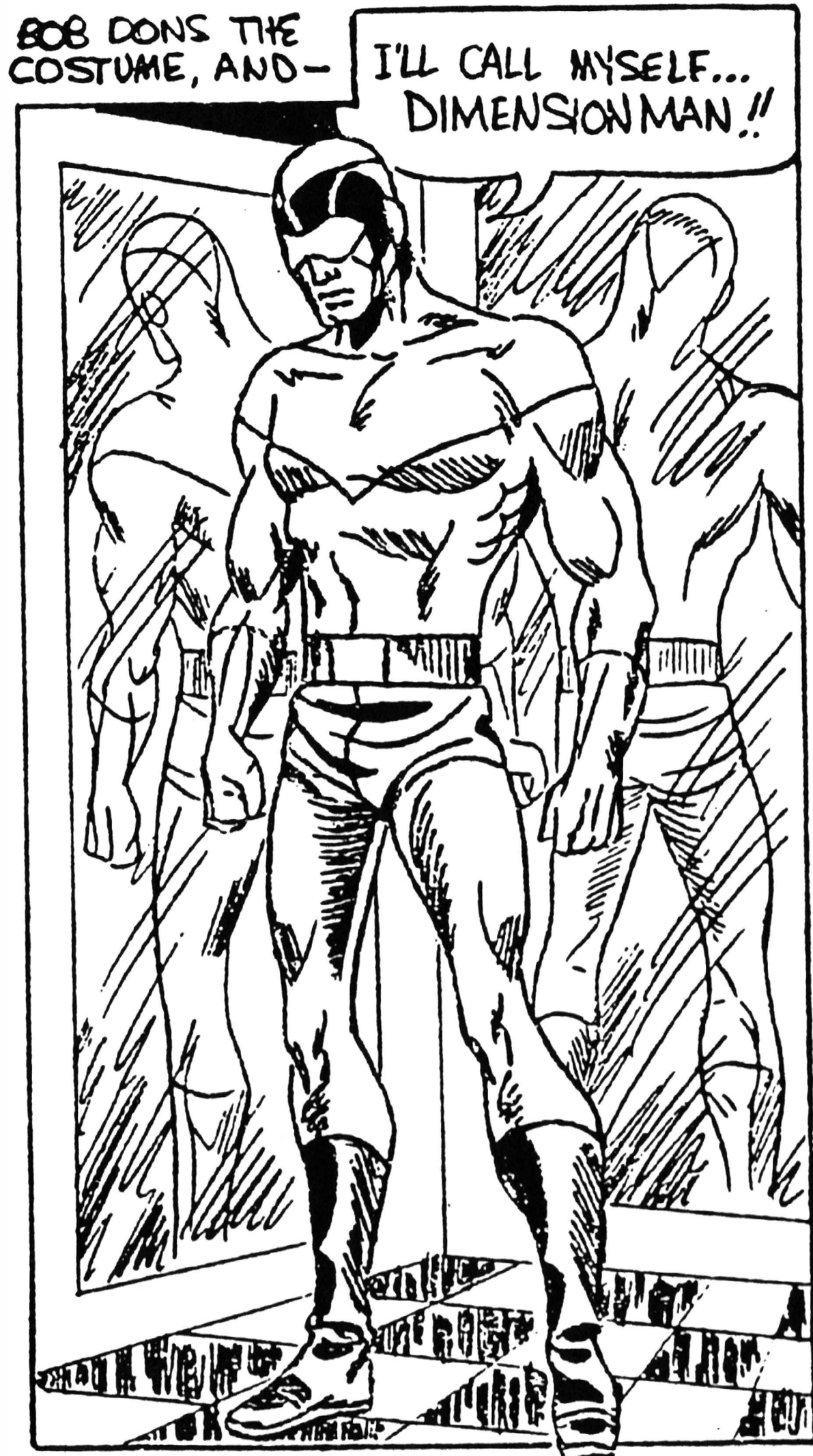
"Ron [Haydock] sent me copies of his own fanzines," Foss wrote in 1962. "*Skybird* #2 was to serve as my initiation as a fan artist. Ron, who had seen samples of my art, asked me to illustrate the cover. The issue featured a blast at DC's

Secret Origins annual and my cover illo pictured the characters in the annual standing around reading the comic itself and bitterly complaining about their so-called 'origin' stories."¹

Two of the earliest writers to surface were Steve Perrin of Santa Barbara, California, and Steve Gerber of University City, Missouri. Both would play key roles in publishing and contributing to early fanzines. Steve Perrin, along with writer Rick Weingroff, was one of the best and most prolific writers in comicdom.

Well-known collectors like L. L. Simpson, Rick Durell, Ed Lahmann and many others also came to the fore, often teaming up with the indexers and data-nuts to help compile the early checklists. Before long, John Wright of South Africa and John Ryan of Australia were spreading the word around the globe.

Ever-supportive Julius Schwartz suggested that Roy compose a letter to plug *Alter-Ego*, and it was duly printed in *JLA* #8 (December-January 1962). The letter appeared just before *A-E* #3 was published, and garnered so many responses that demand for the fanzine now exceeded supply.



Early art by Ronn Foss. Above: *Strange Fantasy* #1 (ca. 1956), a one-of-a-kind comic book written and drawn by Foss, and hand-colored by Grass Green. Left: *Dimension Man*, from *Spotlite* #1 (1961) by Foss.

(Remember, ditto masters would wear out after several hundred copies.) A high percentage of those who responded became "active fans"—too many to list here by name. Suffice it to say that as many as 500 fans were involved by the end of 1961. The development of a successful, varied comic fandom was a group effort.

If one thing was even more important than indexing the history of comics, it was the opportunity to advertise "wants, trades and sales." Fans leapt at the opportunity to advertise in the pages of *A-E*, and soon Bails was being swamped with ads.

"My initial conception of *Alter-Ego* turned out to be unrealistic," Jerry said recently. "I wanted well-researched articles and features, comic strips, news and

ads. Each of these features demanded different deadlines. *The Comickollector* was the first spin-off in September 1961." The premiere issue ran the tag line "*The companion to Alter-Ego.*"

In the first issue Bails announced, "*The Comickollector* is an advertising zine devoted to the swaps and sales announcements of comics collectors and dealers. It will go out *free* to the regular readers of *Alter-Ego*, and to 300 additional comics fans. How often *The Comickollector* is published will depend entirely on the rate at which advertising is received. Want ads, trade lists, and price lists will be published for \$1.00 per quarter page (with a minimum of \$1.00)."³ Thus was launched what would be one of the most enduring fanzines from 1960s fandom.

The first advertisement in *CC* #1, on page one, was from John McGeehan. The issue also contained ads from Frank H. Nuessel, Roy Thomas, Red's Book Shop, Paul Seydor, Claude Held and Ronn Foss.

Also, the first issue set the precedent for running articles as well as ads, with a review of *Fantastic Four* #1 ("Four of a Kind") by Roy Thomas. It had been submitted to Jerry for possible inclusion in *A-E*, with the cover note from Roy reading, "Yesterday I discovered a new comic called *The Fantastic Four*, which just might turn out to really be something. Have you seen it?"⁴ In his review, he writes (in part), "Despite its faults ... *The Fantastic Four* holds promise of becoming one of the better comics now on the stands. One interesting aspect

of this comic ... is that the Thing is a rather rebellious creature who is often at the point of fighting to the death with the leader, Mr. Fantastic.... This feature alone, especially if and when the Torch begins to get in on this running feud, would make it well worth any super-hero fan's dime."⁵

But *Alter-Ego* wasn't finished sub-dividing. Timely news of what's "On The Drawing Board" also didn't fit into the schedule of an irregular article-zine, and so the OTDB feature gained an independent life with #4 dated October 7, 1961. The first few "issues" were merely one-page data sheets every few weeks; with #8, and the name change to *The Comic Reader* in March of the following year, it gradually grew into a multi-page fanzine. As time went on, Jerry began including news of fan events, as well as previews of what to expect in pro comics. Bails took on the role of being the fan with "the inside view," due to his contacts in the industry. Cognizant of the need to maintain those sources, none of his fanzines (at first) contained strong criticism of comics, especially not those from the Schwartz stable. Jerry Bails was now editing and publishing three fanzines.

The first non-Bails fanzine devoted strictly to comics after *A-E* was *Spotlite* (November 1961) from young Parley Holman of Salt Lake City. Holman had seen his first zines when he was about twelve years old. "There were EC fanzines that I had discovered through the *Adventures Into The Unknown* letter column around 1959," he remembered. "Some time in the spring of 1961 I got a truncated version of *Alter-Ego* #1. Jerry Bails was sending it out to people who had letters published in comics. I thought, gosh, I can do something just as good as this!" Par, who in later years would laugh at his youthful brashness, began writing people like Ronn Foss for contributions to his proposed fanzine.

"I had this idea for a character called Dimension Man," Holman explained. "I told [Ronn] about my idea... and on his own he drew a little illustration at the bottom of

one of his letters. The character's visualization more or less came from that drawing of Ronn's."

Dimension Man is significant because he was the first super hero created and published especially for the new comic fandom movement. His battle against Dr. Demon, where he gained the ability to teleport his body from one location to another, was serialized over the first three issues of *Spotlite*, with segments written by Par Holman, Dean Newman and Steve Perrin, respectively.

After Dimension Man, Foss collaborated with another young writer on a strip featuring a character named Little Giant. The writer, who signed the strip S. G. Ross, was in reality Steve Gerber, and the fanzine it appeared in was Gerber's own *Headline* #1 (May 1962). These strips provided an inspiration to dozens of fledgling writers and artists who would, in time, make the amateur comic strip a major part of fandom.

At first, Ronn seemed to be feeling his way, perhaps because this was the first time he had drawn on ditto masters. But he had a strong command of the syntax of comic strip construction, and soon the famous "Foss fluidity" emerged. His panels expressed his sophisticated design-sense, with figures springing into dynamic action. This was no legacy from Kubert or other influences; Foss brought to his strips an individuality that made his work instantly recognizable.

1961 was not yet over, and there was one more development with far-reaching implications to occur: The publication of a brief four-page "fanzine" called *The Rocket's Blast*. Only six to eight copies of the first issue were produced, using carbon paper. There could have been no humbler beginning for this acorn which would one day grow into a mighty oak.

The Rocket's Blast editor Gordon (G. B.) Love was born in 1939 in Atlanta, Georgia. He became a comic fan early with his love for the original Capt. Marvel comics in the 1940s. He dreamed of performing feats of derring-do, but, unlike other boys, even

modest feats of physical prowess would remain outside his grasp.

G. B. Love had cerebral palsy. He had had it since birth, when doctors found certain motor functions of his brain had been damaged.

"I was a little boy the first time I read comic books," Love remembered. "And that is when comic books are magic. You're young. You're weak. You're smaller than anyone else. The whole world is bigger and stronger than you are. You have to deal with the neighborhood bully and a lot of giant adults.

"You read about super heroes. You fantasize. They're super-strong. They're all-powerful. You name it and a super hero has the power to do it ... to achieve all that man has thought of in his wildest moments."⁶

In a 1971 interview, his father (who worked at Royal Bakery in Miami) recounted, "We came down [to Miami] about twelve years ago. I took [Gordon] around to the rehabilitation people and they gave him tests. They said there was just nothing they could do for him. Goodwill offered him a job for \$25 a week, but he wouldn't take that."⁶

G. B. Love had a great deal more to offer than charity make-work, even if his cerebral palsy made telephone communication an uphill battle, and he could only type by clutching a pencil in one hand and striking the keys of an electric typewriter with the eraser end, laboriously, *one by one*.

In a recent interview, Love remembered how he decided to publish a fanzine. "[In 1961] I was looking for something to occupy my time, and hoped to develop something that might eventually become profitable. My original idea was to combine sf and comics in a fanzine, but I quickly dropped the sf and concentrated on my first love, comic books. I picked the name *The Rocket's Blast* myself but I really don't remember how I came up with it."

A letter from Love printed in *Mystery in Space* announced his intention to start a club and put out a newsletter. "At the time I produced the first issue of *RB*, I was unaware of anyone else trying it too. After I began publishing, I



*G. B. Love from Tropic Magazine (Miami Herald) in 1971, with a Don Newton drawing of Capt. Marvel superimposed.
(Photograph by Dave Didio)*

To The Members:

It was a long hard pull but it looks like we made it. Believe it or not I put a lot of hard work into this issue. Like the members. But the information I all fine things The Rocket's Blast will improve with age. As I have said before The S.F.C.A. and The Rocket's Blast will be as good as the members want it to be

A suggestion was made by Duddy Saunders that we print all the names and addresses of all the members in every issue. However, to keep putting the same ones in the paper every month would get kind of dull. Here is what I suggest.

Each time we get a new member we put his or her name and address in the next issue. In other words the members we have now would have their name and address in the next issue.

Next month we will publish some of the letters we receive. Address your letter to:

The S.F.C.A.
9940 Jamaica Dr.
Miami 57, Fla.

: In this space that you are now gazing upon was suppose to be our Feature, an article about one of the members. But the information I asked for from one of the members did not reach me in time to be included in this issue. However, starting with the next issue The Feature will be included.

"Dividing Line"
By B.G. Dubnis Jr.

From his chosen vantage point Martin began yelling to the people across the street. He dared them to cross the line he had just drawn lengthwise across the roadway.

Being a family of honor the Duds took Martin's Dare. Howard, being the head of the clan, stepped over the dividing line first. The rest followed.

The Duds were never to be heard of again for they were no longer residents of this world.

You see, Martin lived in the fifth demension.

"Remember, everything is impossible until it happens."

The Rocket's Blast was initially planned as a newsletter for Gordon Love's "Science Fiction and Comic Association" (SFCA).

think the first fanzine I discovered was *Alter-Ego*."

Love published under the aegis of the "SFCA." This originally stood for Science Fiction and Comic Association, but was changed to South Florida Comic Association. In any case, it was merely the name of Love's company.

The Rocket's Blast was not, at first, primarily devoted to ads. The comics-oriented articles were generally brief and of variable quality. Some were profiles of Golden Age characters; others consisted of commentary on new comics. None of the first eight issues exceeded five legal-sized pages.

If 1961 had been a year for comicdom to take its first tentative steps, 1962 was a time when fandom took a number of confident strides forward. Many of the readers of Bails' fanzines were preparing to take a more active role in the New Year, either with contributions to Jerry's zines, or by publishing their own. Collectors were positively scintillating with excitement over the possibilities of making

connections with their counterparts from around the country.

The Comickollector #2 (January 1962), which boasted a circulation of "over 500" announced a regular bi-monthly publishing schedule. While there were certainly many copies mailed out gratis, subscriptions were now "encouraged" at the rate of six issues for a dollar. The single copy price was 20 cents. The second issue ran twenty-six pages, some of them printed in hard-to-read green ditto, a practice soon discontinued. Obviously there was a pent-up need for a fanzine devoted to the buying, selling and trading of comic books and related material. The concept was an immediate hit.

Its impact on collectors' consciousness was profound. Asking prices of one dealer would guide another. Strange as it seems in retrospect, the condition of a comic for sale was rarely noted, unless a cover was missing. People were so grateful to have *any* way to get their hands on a missing issue that

Letter from Roy Thomas
to Jerry Bails...

223A Meredith Lane
Sullivan, Mo.
October 25, 1961

Dear Jerry,

Excuse me for writing and perhaps making this and my other letter the 51st and 52nd letters you've received today, but I just had a crazy idea and thought it might be worth something. Your self-appointed #1 idea man was just thinking that ALTER-EGO #4, if it could come out by January 1962 (or, if not, an issue of COMICCOLLECTOR or just a newsletter like ON THE DRAWING BOARD), add a new feature: THE ALTER-EGO AWARD, based on the magazine editors like you, supposedly Haydock, maybe Gerber (which

condition was, at first, a secondary concern. If condition was noted, it was usually "mint," "very good" or "poor."

The term "mint" was used in these early days to describe comics in top shape, probably a carry-over from coin collecting or other collectibles, but it wasn't clearly defined and probably included comics that by modern standards would rate as low as "fine" or "fine-plus." Comics from the 1940s that had relatively tight bindings, fairly sharp corners and no major folds were candidates for "mint." Comics that showed obvious wear, possibly even some tape or other repairs, but were complete and in solid condition were described as either "fine" or "very good," with the terms being interchangeable. The "poor" grade of the 1950s and early 1960s would take in today's "fair" to "poor." But there was no agreed-upon standard. If a correspondent wasn't happy with a trade or sale, they would simply return it (postage was cheap) and some form of satisfaction would be negotiated.

In 1962, pro comics jumped into the super hero and super hero revival business with both feet. DC was pushing Aquaman and the Atom ... Dell came up with Brain Boy ... Marvel brought back Sub-Mariner, launched Thor and Ant-Man, and introduced a new character named Spider-Man ... Gold Key weighed in with Tarzan, the Phantom and Dr. Solar. The continued success of most of these creations further buoyed the new fan movement.

Hardly had the New Year passed when Bails unveiled a project that came straight from the heart: *The All-Star Index*, the first extensive Golden Age index to

see print. He was also beginning to think about photographing Golden Age comic covers. Then there was the continual stream of "data sheets" that flowed from his headquarters. As the months went on, it became increasingly clear that, more than anything, Bails had a passion for gathering and disseminating data. After those early *A-E* issues, in fact, he wrote very few text pieces on comics.

Others were also deeply involved in indexing. Don and Maggie Thompson were already on the trail of Dell Four Color information, and Fred von Bernewitz made his *Complete EC Checklist* available again in a revised edition. Starting in 1953, Howard Keltner of Gainesville, Texas, began indexing the comics in his own collection. By the early 1960s, he was collecting data for an index on the contents of every Golden Age comic book, and received co-credit on Bails' eventual *DC Index* in 1963.

Also on Jerry's mind was a pair of projects that Roy had suggested the previous October (just before *A-E* #3). In a letter to Bails, Thomas wrote: "I just had a crazy idea and thought it might be worth something. Your self-appointed #1 idea man was just thinking that *Alter-Ego* ... should add a new feature: *The Alter-Ego Award*, based on the Academy Award system. Maybe you could get prominent collectors ... to form a committee to nominate the candidates for the award (which I suggest be called an 'Alley' after both *Alter-Ego* and Alley Oop, who, living in prehistoric times, is the earliest possible adventure hero.)"⁷ Thomas, who volunteered to do all the work on the first Alley poll, dubbed the proposed

nominating committee "the Academy."

Jerry was always receptive to new ways to add respectability to the hobby, and to unify and organize fandom. He took Roy's kernel of an idea for an Academy and ran with it, expanding it into the Academy of Comic Arts and Sciences. During the weeks and months that followed, the idea captured his imagination. His vision for the future of comicdom was beginning to take shape.

Alter-Ego and *The Comiccollector* took a back seat to all this, and the publication of *The Comic Reader*.

Thus, Jerry Bails made an announcement that summer that shocked members of comic fandom: he was stepping down as editor and publisher of both *Alter-Ego* and *The Comiccollector*!

Footnotes - Chapter 3

¹Ronn Foss, letter, *The Comic Reader* #12, August 20, 1962.

²The West Coast Zine (WCZ) group consisted of Larry (*Terror*) Byrd, Charlie (*Beyond*) Scarborough and Jiro (*Plague*) Tomiyama—as well as Haydock with *Ape* and *Skybird*.

³Jerry Bails, editorial matter, *The Comiccollector* #1, September 1961.

⁴Roy Thomas, letter to Jerry Bails, August 12, 1961.

⁵Roy Thomas, "Four of a Kind," *The Comiccollector* #1, September 1961.

⁶*Tropic Magazine*, Miami Herald, John De Groot, "The Super Labors Of Love," May 2, 1971.

⁷Roy Thomas, letter to Jerry Bails, October 25, 1961.

4

Advent of the Amateur Comic Strip

Jerry Bails unleashed his bombshell in two stages. First, in *The Comickollector* #6 (July 1962), he announced, "In order to allow time for work on *Alter-Ego* #4, *The Comickollector* will not be published during the summer. Please do not send me advertising, subscription renewals, or orders for the next issue until further notice."

The success of *CC* was becoming a burden.

Then, in *The Comic Reader* #12 (a month later), came another message from Bails that caused seismic tremors through comicdom: "*Alter-Ego* #4, which I hope will be my finest ... will be my last! Other demands upon my time make it impossible for me to continue as the publishing editor of *Alter-Ego* and *The Comickollector*, but rather than let these popular fanzines die the death of most amateur efforts, I am passing the reins on to another fan ... whose interest, talent, and capacities offer the greatest promise."¹

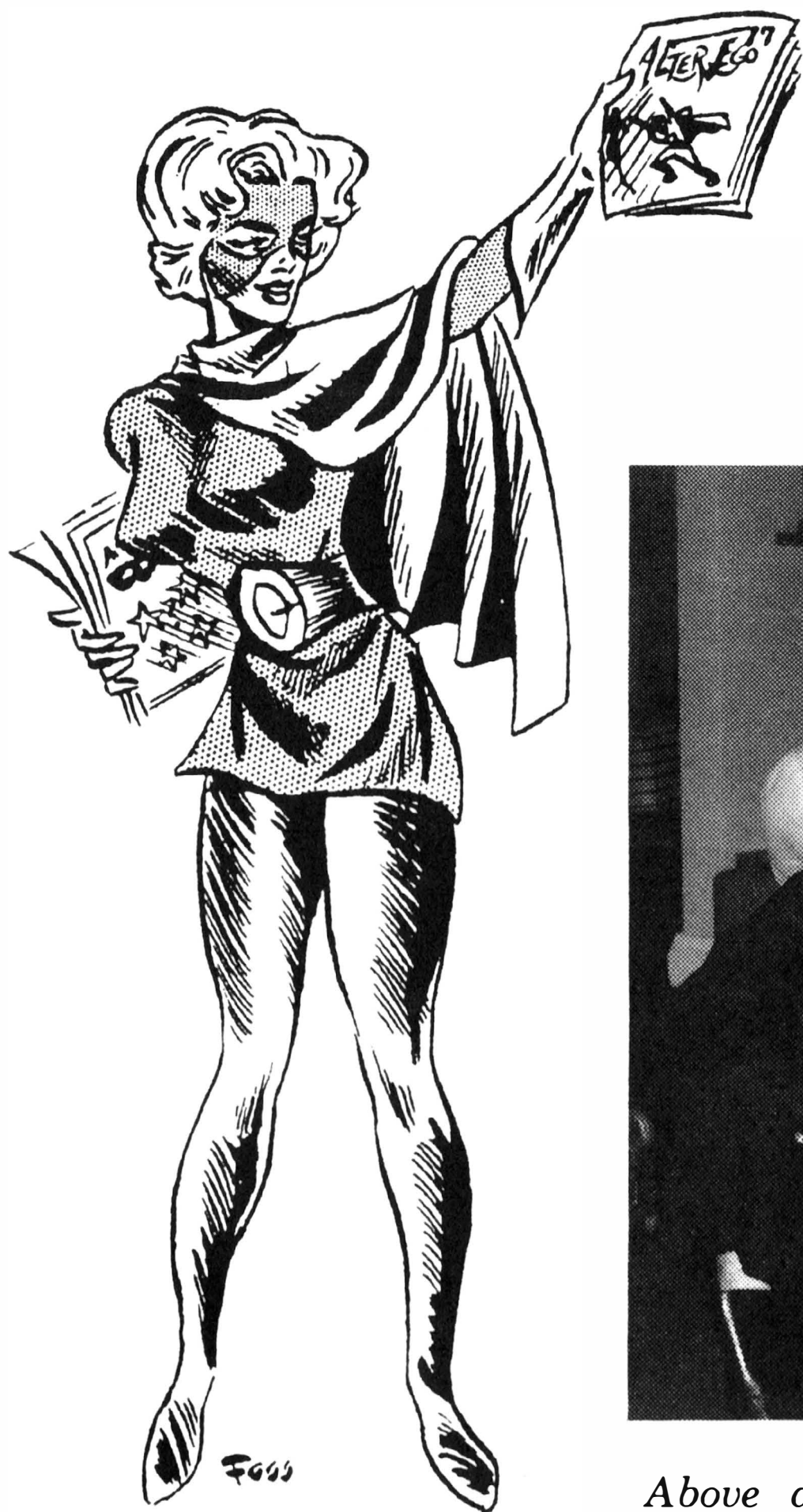
That fan was Ronn Foss.

In that same issue, Ronn explained how he inherited the *A-E/CC* mantle: "On June 3rd I wrote Jerry Bails of my interest in zine publishing. I mentioned some of my ideas and aspirations. He wrote back that he was looking for someone to assume publication of *A-E* and *CC*. By late June it was decided. America's leading comic fanzines (the circulations prove it) would change hands—from a dedicated, knowledgeable, proficient, and probably weathered editor, to not one, or even two, but three dedicated and enthusiastic editors! Yes, there are three of us: my wife [Myra], an aspiring writer; our partner, Richard Green, more like a brother, a truly great artist; and finally, yours truly, an avid fan and also an aspiring comic artist."²

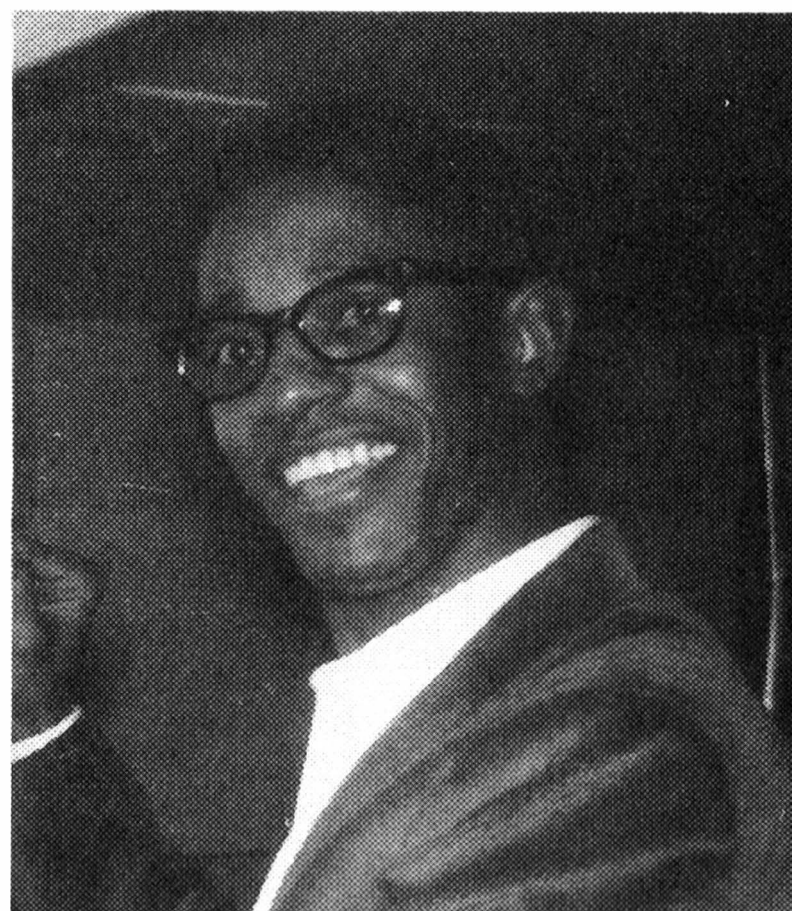
Foss dubbed the threesome Triad, and assured fans that he intended to continue publishing *CC* on a bi-monthly basis. And so the base of operations for these two seminal fanzines moved from Detroit, Michigan, to Suisun, California.

The main difference between the Bails *CC* and the Triad *CC* was the inclusion of more artwork, creating a livelier appearance, as well as greater length. *CC* #7 (September 1962) had thirty-four pages, the largest issue yet. Foss added a letter column, and some features like "Graham Crackers" by long-time comic collector Ron Graham (who worked with Ted White on *The Facts Behind Superman*) were carried over, as well as "Auction Block."

The Comickollector #8 introduced its hostess, Joy Holiday, whose name was suggested by the Christmas season. Joy was a figure drawn by Foss, ostensibly a beautiful woman in a colorful costume, like a super heroine. Instead of appearing in strips, she acted as a mascot for *CC* and *AE*. An actual costume was sewn, and three women posed in it for photographs that were published in *AE* and elsewhere: Ronn's sister Beverly Ann Foss, Roy Thomas' girlfriend Linda Rahm, and another female friend of Roy's named Pauline Copeman. Photos



Above and below: Ronn Foss with sister Beverly Ann, one of three women to portray the lovely Joy Holiday, fandom's favorite femme-fan.



Richard "Grass" Green, the Clown Prince of Comic Fandom. His nickname was short for "Grasshopper." Below: An early strip by Grass (Comickollector #7); note the Fighting American reference.



of Joy Holiday appeared in *Alter Ego* starting with #5.

The Comicollector began including comic strips. The first one, "American Man, with Battleboy and Cyclone, the Boy Marvels," was a seven-pager in CC #7 by Richard "Grass" Green, very much in the Fighting American tradition. #8 featured "Da Frantic Four," a parody of the Fantastic Four by Green.

Richard Green was born in 1939 in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. "With three sisters and four brothers, I can't remember a time in my life when there wasn't a comic laying around somewhere," Green remembered. "I drew stick figures when I was three or four. My mother asked me who I was drawing, and I answered, 'Sam,' my oldest brother. She took my hand and we drew two circles on the face of my stick man, because Sam wore glasses. My mother died when I was only six, and this story is one of the few memories I have of her."

Green and Foss, who both lived in Ft. Wayne, met in ninth grade and became best friends when they discovered a mutual interest in writing and drawing comic strips. They spent endless hours together during their high school years yakking about comics, comparing drawings, and creating hundreds of their own characters. The duo often collaborated on strips, with Grass coloring Ronn's artwork, just for their own amusement. Both yearned to become comics professionals.

It was Ronn who gave him the nickname "Grass," which was actually shortened from "Grasshopper." It was also Foss who encouraged Green to participate in comicdom, after he got out of the Air Force.

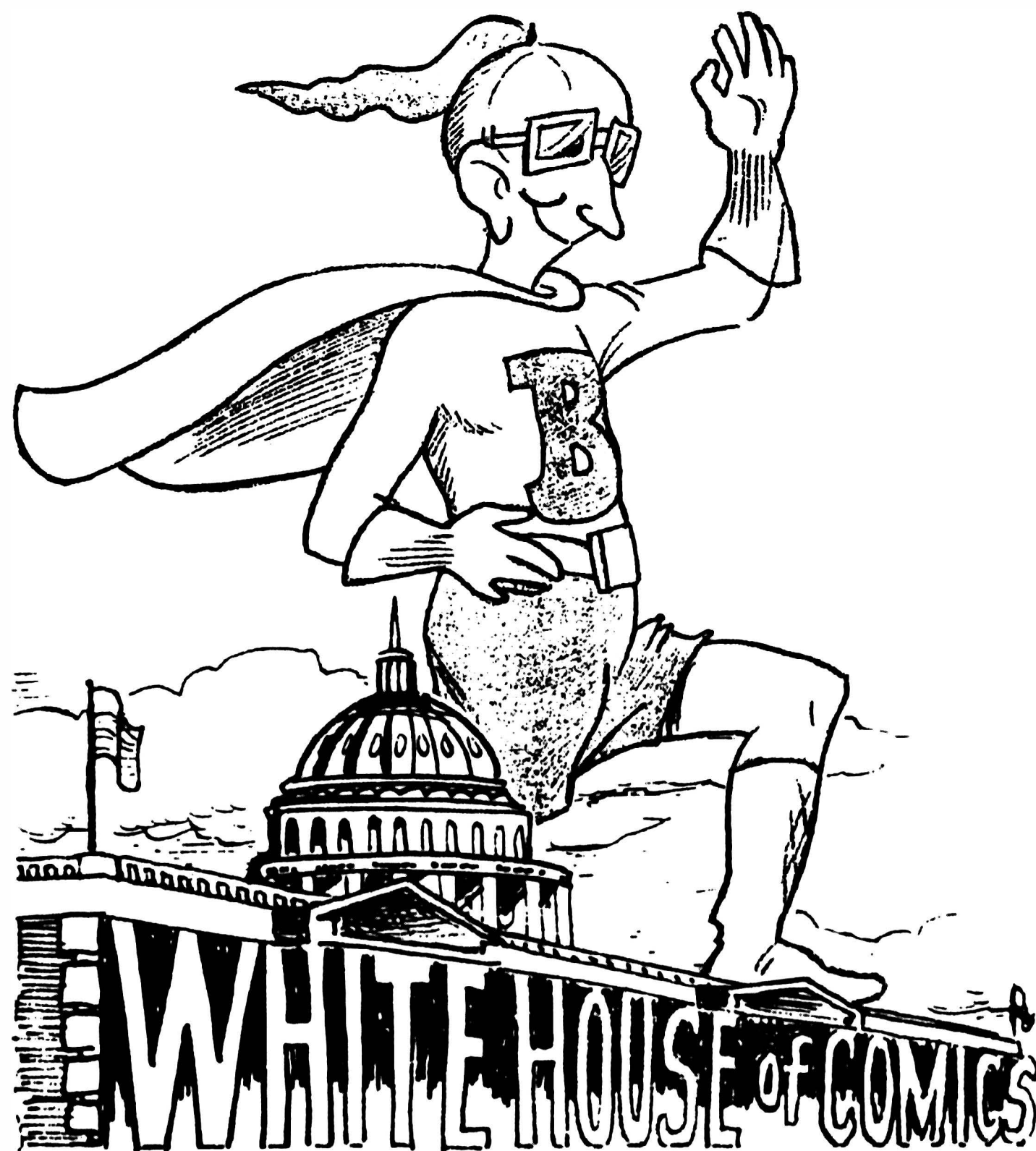
"Ronn introduced me into comic fandom as 'Grass' and it caught on," Green said. "Since it's from the old days of fandom, I still wear it proudly."

Green made an immediate positive impression, for his artwork (after years of practice) was quite accomplished. His style was reminiscent of Simon and Kirby, yet it had its own original slant. Actually, Green's first fanzine strip wasn't in *The Comicollector*; "The Blade" (the story of a carnival knife-thrower who donned a special costume to rescue his abducted assistant) appeared in the third issue of a little unassuming ditto fanzine by the name of *Komix Illustrated*.

Making the scene in July 1962, *Komix Illustrated* soon became a fan favorite. The reason? It was entirely written and drawn by a talented man named Bill J. White, who lived in Columbia, Missouri. *KI* was the first fanzine to prominently feature amateur comic strips, usually two per issue.

Bill White (born June 4, 1929) was known affectionately as Capt. Biljo, because of his own self-caricatures in that persona that appeared in nearly all his fanzines. "When I was quite young, I talked my parents into buying me the flying cap with goggles that was so popular in the 1930s," he explained. "I raced around with my arms outstretched, giving out a genuine motor sound. Yep—just me and my spad. As a youth I wanted to fly more than to be a cartoonist. Regarding myself as a kid who never grew up, I used Capt. Biljo as my identity in my fanzines. I'm still the kid with the flying cap and goggles."

Capt. Biljo actually planned *Komix Illustrated* before he had seen *Alter-Ego* or other fanzines. He was



Capt. Biljo looms large in the legend of the White House of Comics, home of an impressive collection of Golden Age comic books. Bill J. White wrote and drew *Komix Illustrated*, the first super-hero fanzine to rely heavily on amateur comic strips like "Son of Satan," depicted below.





Splash panel to the debut of *The Fog* in *Komix Illustrated* #1 (July 1962). Biljo White had the knack of creating simple, yet impressive, images on ditto masters. (The original inked version of this strip eventually saw print in *All-Stars* #1 in 1965.)



Capt. Biljo receives his 1962 silver Alley Award trophy from Ronn Foss. This is one of the few photographs of the trophies that were designed and crafted by Foss, painted silver for the amateurs and gold for the pros. (See Page 68 for a photo of the original redwood carving.) For a time, it appeared that White would succeed Foss as Editor/Publisher of *Alter Ego*. [From AE #6]

delighted to find others who loved the old comics as much as he did. A firefighter by day, a comic fan and artist by night, White's style had a simplicity and charm that resembled the Golden Age work of C. C. Beck on the original Captain Marvel. His fanzine was perhaps the most visually appealing of the early amateur publications.

After Biljo left the Army in 1952, he had concentrated on his cartooning with an eye toward breaking into the pro markets with concepts he'd developed while stationed in Germany. But a visit to the DC offices at the time elicited no interest, and he was left to putter around with his art until he and fandom crossed paths. Suddenly White had a perfect outlet for his pent-up creativity.

The first issue of *KI* (July 1962) cover-featured a super hero he had created in the early 1950s: the Fog. The origin of the Fog was an moody tale of an infant left to die in the ocean on a foggy night. Rescued by kindly Capt. Macomber, young Bud Macomber grows up to discover that he turns invisible for four hours whenever his body comes into contact with fog.

Komix Illustrated also introduced Biljo's Son of Satan in #2 (September 1962), Astro Ace in #4 (November 1962) and the Lion in #10 (aka *Limbo* #1, May 1963).

White's art was perfect for the ditto medium. "A lot of that stuff was very spontaneous," he recalled recently. "I wouldn't plan too much—sometimes I didn't even know what would happen on the next page. That was part of the fun." One of the aspects of Biljo's strips that his male readers appreciated were his busty females, doubtless influenced by the "good girl art" comics of the late 1940s and early 1950s. But even there, his art exuded charm and innocence.

Though Biljo's work naturally dominated *KI*, he also published excellent early material by Foss ("Terror In The Big Top!" featuring The Viper) and Green ("The Blade" and "Speed Marvel"). White also ran a series of "Profiles of Collectors," as well as his "Shazamers" series of articles on 1940s comic heroes, culled from Capt. Biljo's collection which was kept in the legendary White House of Comics—in reality, a cinder block building on White's property designed to securely house his horde of valuable comics, which was quite large. However, it was the amateur comic strips in *Komix Illustrated* that stood out.

His Astro Ace, the mysterious astronaut trained in secrecy for the most dangerous space missions, was the first fan-character to cross over to another fanzine. The second and third parts of the story were told in Mike Vosburg's *Masquerader* #4 (March/April 1963) and #5 (May/June 1963). Voz, who lived in Pontiac, Michigan, began publishing his fanzine just three months after *KI*.

Masquerader #1 (September 1962) headlined a character that Vosburg and Foss had been grooming for some time, though it was essentially Mike's concept: The Cowl, a costumed character (with no super powers) who was an ex-cop, forced to don a mask to fight crime because he was wrongly accused of murdering his partner. Future issues of *Mask* offered "Action Ace and Thrill Boy" by Grass Green (#4), the aforementioned "Astro Ace" strips by Biljo White, and more Vosburg characters.



At the time, Mike was already an aspiring artist, and received considerable tutelage by the older and more accomplished Ronn Foss. That led to a close friendship between the two, with extensive correspondence—punctuated, at intervals, by in-person visits. Both were Kubert fanatics, and spear-headed the "Save Hawkman!" campaign that swept fandom in the wake of the *Brave and Bold* issues featuring the Winged Wonder. In fact, Hawkman appeared on the cover of all six issues of *Masquerader*. When asked what he remembered most about fandom, Voz answered without hesitation, "Getting mail! I was this nerdy little kid, terrified of girls, very quiet, not an athlete, but yet when I got home I had this massive correspondence waiting for me."

When one examines these, the earliest of the amateur comic strips from the Golden Age of comic fandom, one is struck not so much by occasional technical shortcomings, but by the obvious talent of the writers and artists involved. Thomas, Foss, Perrin, Green, Vosburg and White all demonstrated astounding potential, causing fans to sit up and take notice. Among the ranks of the fledgling fan movement were creators whose work was, in its own way, as exciting as that of the pros themselves. What, fans wondered, would they do when they *really* hit their stride?

In addition to the proliferating amateur comic strips, there were other interesting developments toward the end of 1962.

Dick and Pat Lupoff's sensational appearance as Captain and Mary Marvel at the 1960 World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh led a number of the members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society to decide to make a group appearance at the 1962 Worldcon in Chicago dressed

as the Justice Society of America. Several of the costumes were prepared by Bjo Trimble and Dian Girard.

The JSA contingent consisted of Wonder Woman (Dian Girard), Flash (Fred Patten), Dr. Fate (Bruce Pelz), Green Lantern (Ted Johnstone), Sandman (John Trimble), Hawkman (Jack Harness) as well as Black Canary and Dr. Mid-Nite. Also in attendance were Batman (Larry Ivie), Robin (Les Gerber), another Flash (Rick Norwood) and a Flash Gordon group.

Ivie had glued the eye-slits of his Batman cowl to his glasses, creating a rather strange effect; Harness as Hawkman was forced to keep his arms aloft to hold up his wings. John Trimble had been hesitant to participate until he saw the very cool gas mask and green suit that had been prepared for the portrayal of the original Sandman.

For some reason, the LASFS didn't compete in the "Best Group" competition, or they would surely have won; instead, the Flash

Gordon ensemble was awarded the citation in that category.

"Chicago was one of the badly-run [costume] competitions," Bruce Pelz said recently. "The costumers were put in a circular line to parade past the judges with no chance for announcement, no nothing. It was known as 'the Chicon Shuffle.' If they didn't know what the costume was, too bad. It was so bad that it set off George Scithers to invent what has turned into today's costume competitions."

Also at the ChiCon masquerade were Don and Maggie Thompson, portraying Fawcett's Ibis the Invincible and his assistant Taia. 1962 was a banner year for the Thompsons, for they were married in June, and produced the two best issues of *Comic Art* to date. *CA* #3 came out in April and #4 in December, with circulations of 200 and 250 copies, respectively. *Comic Art* #3 carried an article by Don Thompson on Sam's Strip, and Dick Lupoff's "A Study In Scarlet," the first in a projected series (a la AICFAD) called "Also



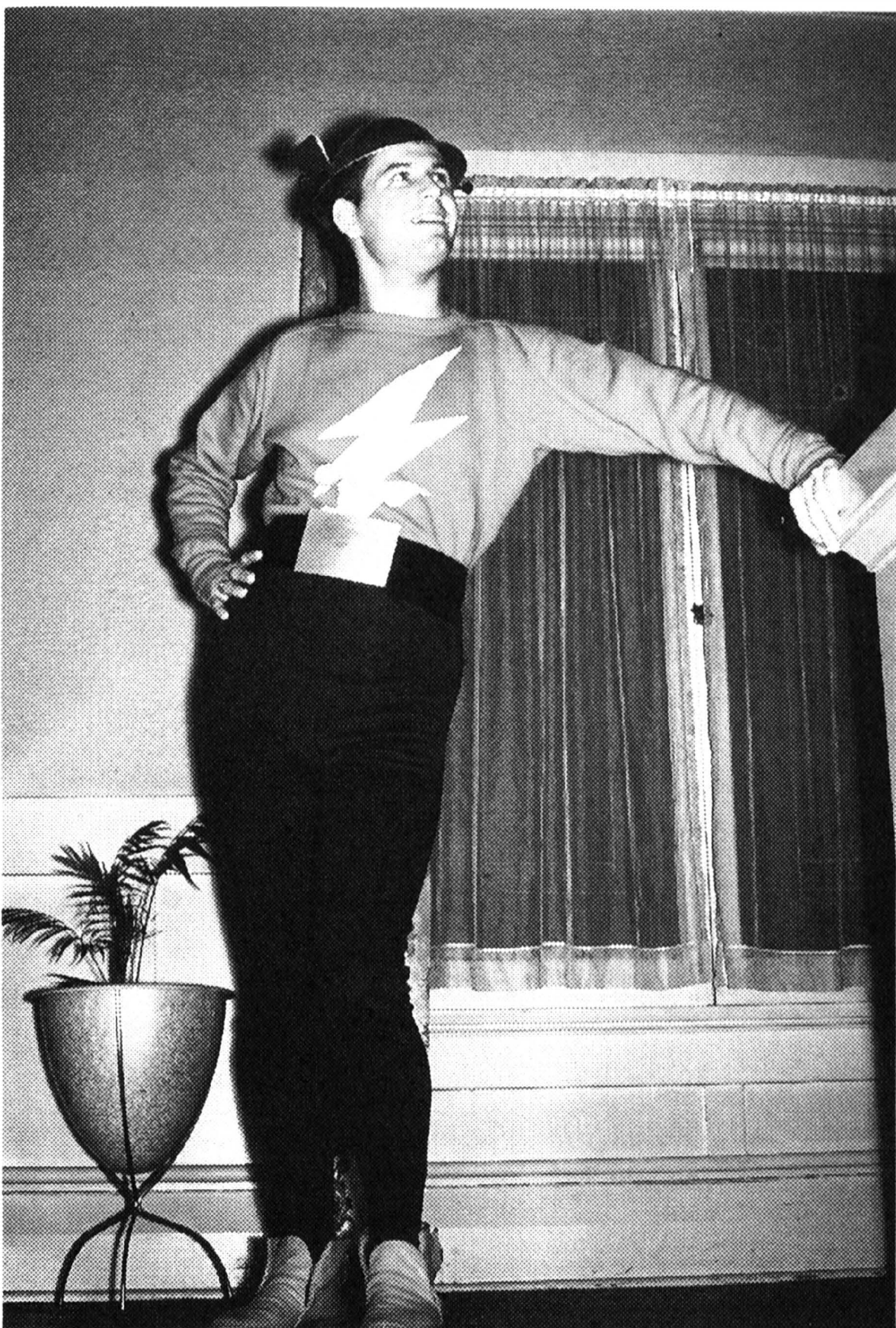
WorldCon 1962 in Chicago. Left to right: Maggie Thompson as Taia, Don Thompson as Ibis, Larry Ivie as Batman, Les Gerber as Robin.



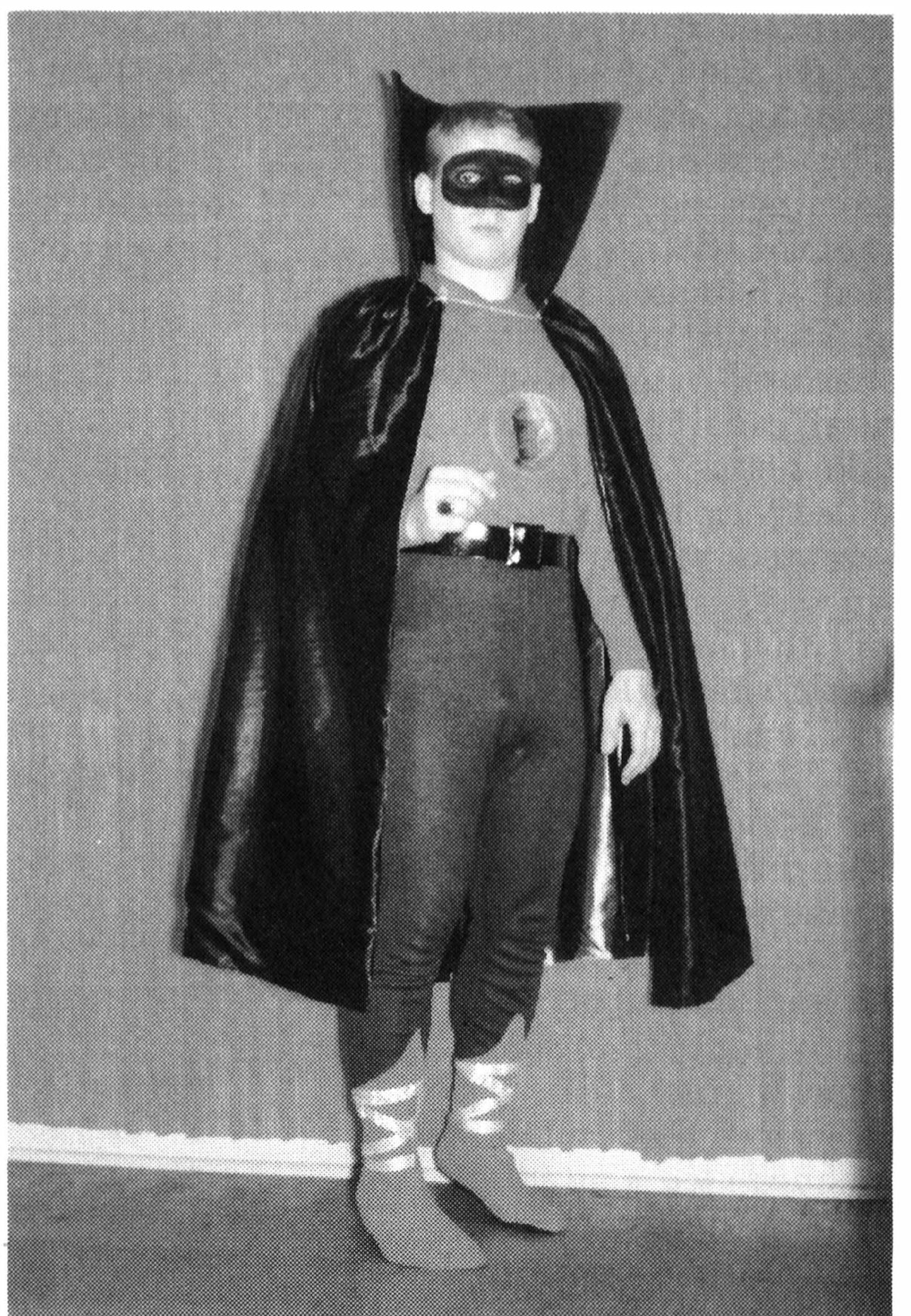
Dian Girard



Bruce Pelz



Fred Patten



Ted Johnstone

in this issue...." Herb Beach named his choice for "The Top Ten of the Golden Era"—comic book creators, that is, and Larry Ivie appended a few thoughts of his own to the subject. (Beach's list of those who did the most for early comic books included Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, Bob Kane, C. C. Beck, Charles Biro, Gardner F. Fox, Carl Barks, Will Eisner, Charles Moulton and Fred Guardineer. Not a bad list, and one that showed that comic fan's knowledge of the people behind the comics of that bygone era.)

The cover of *Comic Art* #4 featured Ed Wheelan and his "Minute Movies," to go along with an article on the strip. That issue also had pieces on such diverse subjects as Sergio Aragones, Barbie, James Swinnerton and the Neal Adams' "Ben Casey" syndicated strip. *Comic Art* was genuinely unique in comicdom for its mix of intelligent, often provocative, articles on the entire spectrum of, well ... comic art. Unfortunately (for its readers), 1962 was the last year more than one issue appeared; in fact, due to a Cleveland newspaper strike, no new issues were published until 1964.

Throughout 1961 and 1962, *Xero* had continued to impress with the "All In Color For A Dime" series.

Xero #4 (April 1961) offered Don Thompson's study on Timely comics of the 30s and 40s called "O.K. Axis, Here We Come!" which took its title from a comic book house ad circa 1940. At eighteen pages, it was the longest entry yet, and was decorated with "illoes

swiped by Maggie." Don spent most of the article discussing Timely's Big Three (Captain America, Sub-Mariner and Human Torch), especially in the context of their propagandist escapades during World War II, but also Timely's second-tier characters such as The Vision, The Angel, Sun Girl and Blonde Phantom, as well as the Young Allies. Thompson singled out writer Mickey Spillane for excoriation (many of those Timely anti-war strips *did* portray rather extreme violence), and particularly commented on the unusual penchant that the Timely heroes' displayed of fighting among themselves. His conclusion? "Good or bad," he wrote, "they had character."

Dick Lupoff's piece in *Xero* #6 ("The Several Soldiers of Victory") curiously focused on a minor, poorly-executed series in *Leading Comics*, and was one of the shortest entries in the AICFAD series. Issue #6 also carried Dick Ellington's article on Fiction House's *Planet Comics*, "Me To Your Leader Take." Don Thompson returned in *Xero* #7 with "The Wild Ones," a solid piece on DC's god-like heroes, The Spectre and Dr. Fate.

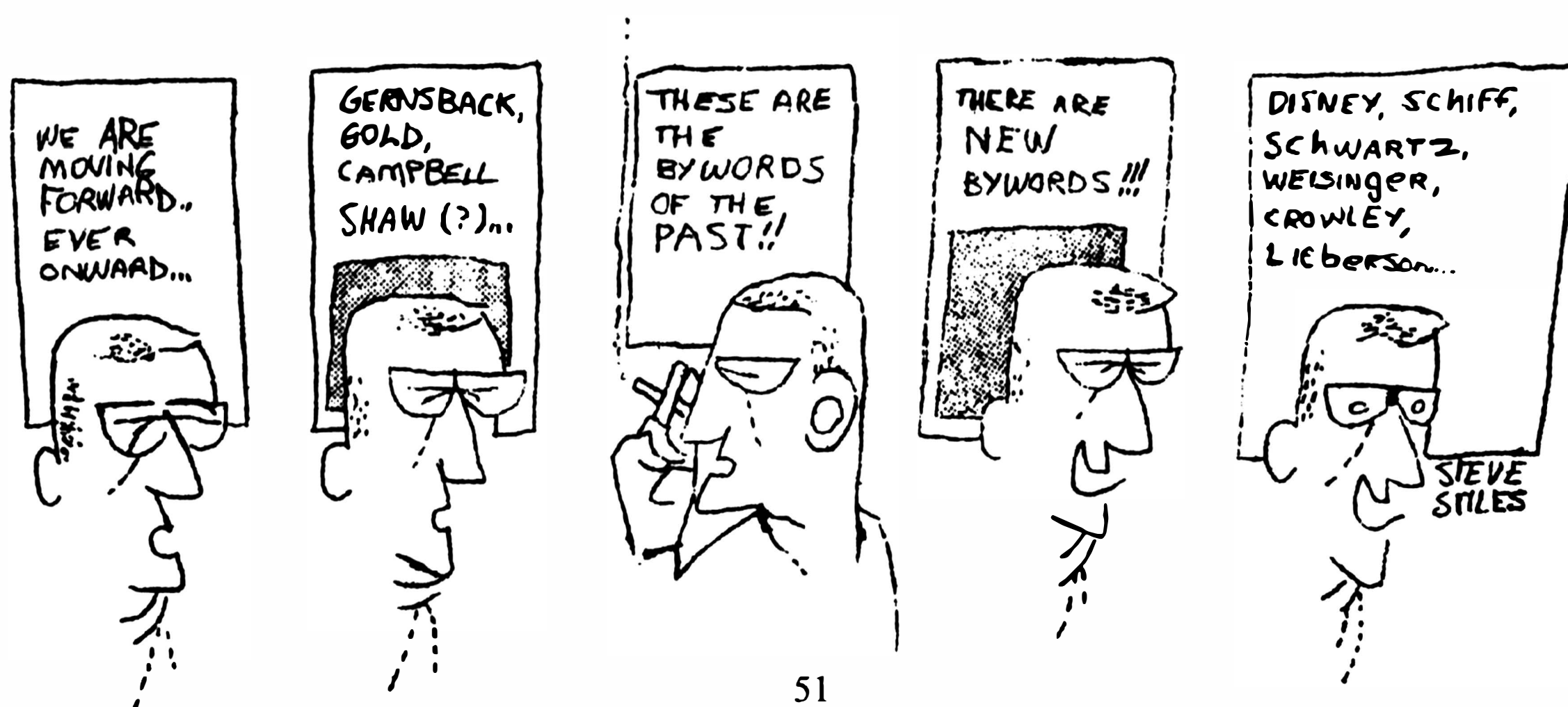
Then in #8 (April 1962) came one of the best entries of the series, "The Education of Victor Fox," by Richard Kyle. The longest of the series by far, this 27-page opus was not remarkable for its factual coverage of the Fox line of comics, though it did that; it was simply a highly entertaining, humorous and often thought-provoking stroll through the sometimes bizarre world of comics

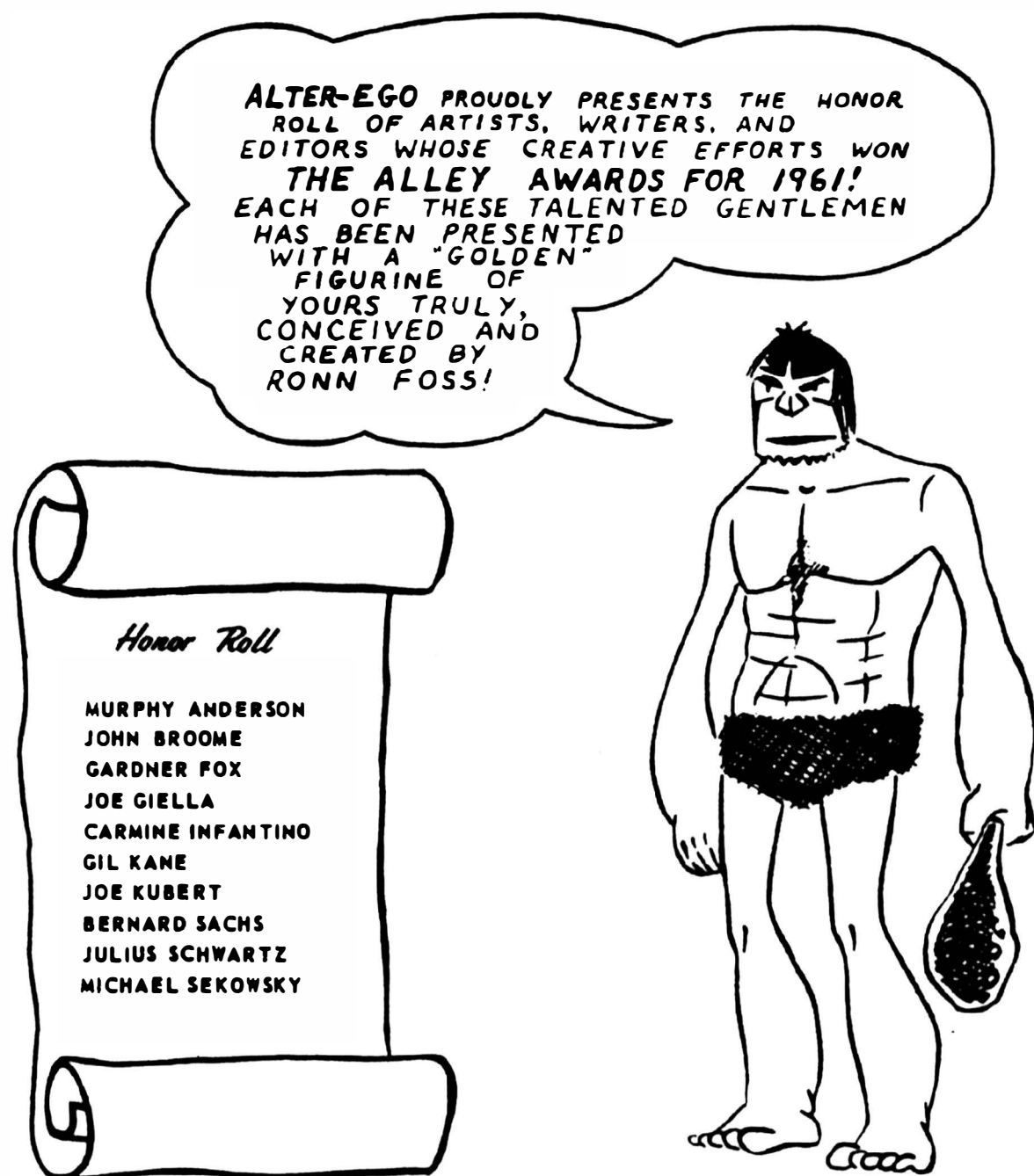
fashioned by their self-styled "King." After recounting some of the silly promotional gimmicks in Fox's comics (were any bottles of Kooba Cola ever actually manufactured?), Kyle got serious: "With the instinct of a man in the wrong business, he did the thing that has destroyed marginal publishers again and again and again. What Victor S. Fox did led directly to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority. Without Fox and the publishers like him, the Code would never have come into being. His magazines ... turned toward the sado-masochists, the fetishists, and the other hangers-on in the borderlands of sexual neuroticism.

"Like all promoters, [Fox] could never understand that you can't sell people entertainment—not with prize contests and premiums—they have to buy it. Nor could he understand what every good editor and publisher knows, and what the bad ones seem never to believe—that you can always sell sex, but you can never sell depravity, not in the long haul, not in the competitive market. The public only pays for what it wants. And most people have a mean streak of decency in them.

"This was Victor S. Fox's education."³

Recently, Richard Kyle explained why "The Education of Victor Fox" was not among the AICFAD articles included in the Arlington Press book several years later. "I realized that the Fox piece was far too long in relation to the other articles. For proper balance, it would have to be cut about in half, which meant that I would





From Alter-Ego #4 (November 1962)

have to effectively rewrite the entire piece. I didn't have the time. My own feeling is that the book benefits from the absence of the Fox piece. It wasn't in the tone of the other articles, and wouldn't have contributed to the nice comic-fan feeling in the final book, which was very enjoyable."

The penultimate AICFAD chapter was "Capt. Billy's Whiz Gang," by Roy Thomas, in *Xero* #9. Roy has admitted that he was never particularly proud of this article about Master Man, Spy-Smasher, Capt. Midnight and other secondary Fawcett characters, for it was written in one frantic day, in response to increasingly angry postcards from Dick Lupoff, who had loaned him most of the comics used for research.

The last entry in AICFAD was "Sparky Watts and the Big Shots," also by Richard Kyle. Not as weighty as his piece on Victor Fox, it was nevertheless a respectable segment. *Xero* #10, which didn't appear until the beginning of 1963, was the final issue of the Hugo-winning fanzine.

"The actual page count was up over 100, or around 100 per issue," Dick Lupoff explained. "It was getting very elaborate. We were farming out printing jobs, and having gatefold artwork, and multi-color mimeography and so forth. Although a circulation of approximately 300 copies sounds like peanuts today, in those days, that was a very large circulation for a fan magazine.

"It was a lot of work. We decided fairly early on, somewhere around the seventh issue, that we were going to cut it off, but rather than simply stop ... it always struck me as very disorderly to stop publication and leave a lot of loose ends, so we announced that there would be ten issues, and there were. Then we did that extra index edition, not only for the sake of the index, but also to permit readers to write letters to the editor and get in their parting shot comments on the last issue." Although Lupoff had always planned on reprinting all the AICFAD

segments under one cover, the project wouldn't materialize until the decade's end.

In November 1962, the long-awaited *Alter-Ego* #4 appeared—also an "ending" of sorts, for it was the last article-zine published by Jerry Bails. It was the first issue to be professionally printed, by photo-offset (or "litho" as it was sometimes called). Jerry ordered a (then) staggering 1000 copies. While they did not sell out immediately, all copies were gone within the next couple of years, many at a premium price of 75 cents each, and are now extremely hard to find.

To make the Alley Awards more special, Ronn Foss designed 8" golden statuettes portraying Alley Oop, which would become comicdom's version of the Oscar. (They were made of plaster from his original redwood carving.) The cover of *A-E* #4 by Foss and Green depicting the statuette and the year's winners was printed in two colors, black and *gold*, to stunning effect. Inside, a glance at the contents page makes it clear that this is the first issue of *A-E* to truly draw upon the varied and diverse talents available in the comic fan movement in mid-1962.

After Jerry's editorial, the Alley Award winners for 1961 were announced:

Best Regularly-Published Comic Book:

Justice League of America

Best Adventure Hero(ine) Having Own Comic Book:

Green Lantern

Best Adventure Hero(ine)

Not Having Own Comic-Book:

Hawkman

Best Supporting Character:

Elongated Man

Best Cover:

Flash #123 ("Flash of Two Worlds")

Best Single Issue of a Comic-Book:

Flash #123

Best Artist (Pencil or Ink):

Carmine Infantino

Best Story:

"Flash of Two Worlds"

Best Adventure-Hero Group:

Justice League of America

Hero or Heroine Most Worth of Revival:

The Spectre

Worst Comic-Book Currently Published:

Wonder Woman

Roy Thomas, Secretary of the Academy of Comic-Book Arts and Sciences, discussed the results and admitted that there had been some shortcomings in the design of the categories which would be corrected in the next poll.

The major article in *A-E* #4 was Howard Keltner's loving tribute entitled "MLJ Leads The Way!" which recounted the careers of MLJ's nine leading costumed characters from the early 1940s, including the Wizard, the Shield, Steel Sterling and the Black Hood. This was followed by Ed Lahmann's piece on BLB character Maximo, the Amazing Superman. Then Ron Haydock weighed in with one of the best of his Serialously Speaking columns, "The Exploits of Batman and Robin" in the Columbia serials of the 1940s. Last came



Cover and sample pages from the origin of *The Eclipse*, Master of the Midnight Hours, scripted by Drury Moroz and illustrated by Ronn Foss.
Alter Ego #5 (March 1963)





L. L. Simpson's study of Daredevil's classic foes Iron Jaw and the Claw. It was an excellent issue, and a fitting end to Bails' tenure.

With the approach of comic fandom's second anniversary in 1963 (if one marks its formal beginning from the publication of *Alter-Ego* #1), there was accumulating evidence that comicdom was gaining momentum.

For one thing, the number of fanzines had grown considerably. In all of 1961 there had been only a handful. Now there were at least fourteen. By the end of the year, there were so many fanzines that quality was beginning to suffer; one of the debates among established fan editors was "What should we do to stop the spread of crud-zines?" (Ultimately, it was conceded that nothing *could* be done, other than printing fanzine reviews and ratings.) Many of the new zines, however, were very good.

Further evidence of increasing maturity could be found in *The Comickollector* #9 (January 1963), which printed an early attempt to standardize comic book grading conditions. It was written by Leonard Brown of Long Beach, California. The suggested grades were Uncirculated, Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor. The first widely-publicized standard wouldn't appear until the following year.

Apparently there was quite a wait for the next issue of CC, because #10 and #11 were mailed together in May. The delay was undoubtedly because Ronn was pulling out all the stops in the production of his first issue of *Alter Ego*, which turned out to be the most professional-appearing comic book fanzine up to that point. Foss dropped the hyphen in the fanzine's title and added the cover legend (which was retained through #9): "Featuring Comic Heroes of the Past, Present and Future!" It was a livelier, more varied magazine than the Bails issues, topped off with a stunning comic strip.

Sf fan Stan Woolston contributed a thought-provoking fannish feature called "The Mystery of Fandom"—Woolston's musings about the mystique of fandom, and some ideas on how to enhance the fan experience. *AE* #5 also carried "The Future of Fandom—Unlimited!" by Dr. Jerry Bails, Ph.D., which suggested various types of articles he would like to see in future fanzines.

SO—YOU WANT TO COLLECT COMICS?

In that issue, Ed Lahmann wrote "So—You Want To Collect Comics?" which provided the reader with a "basic list to give the new collector some idea of what comprises a well rounded collection." Lahmann blithely rattled off a list of comics that would have cost

hundreds of dollars at the time, and many thousands today. Also on hand was Foss' pal Ron Haydock, with perhaps his most memorable Serialously Speaking column, "A Distant Thunder of Rocket Men!"

In *A-E* #1 and 2, Thomas had created his concept for a revival of the Spectre, and other fans (like Larry Ivie and Steve Perrin) had also been working up their own proposed revivals of pro heroes; thus, when Ronn Foss and Drury Moroz decided to collaborate on a strip, they naturally aimed for a revival of their own. They settled on Dr. Mid-Nite. When DC called a moratorium on amateur revivals of their copyrighted characters, Moroz and Foss skirted the dictum by altering their hero's name and costume. They came up with the name the Eclipse, actually a better name than Dr. Mid-Nite to suggest the victory of the hero over lawlessness. Foss finished the strip during the early months of 1963 and the origin of the Eclipse in *Alter Ego* #5 (March) became the first super hero strip in the fanzines of the 1960s that was printed via photo-offset.

Ronn worked especially hard on it, because he hoped that it would land him work at DC; Julie Schwartz was right at the top of the *AE* mailing list. Never had Foss' work more resembled that of fan favorite Carmine Infantino. The panels were often elongated, and the backgrounds were spare, and stylized.

Dru Moroz' script was superb, starting with the tag lines, "Master of the midnight hours, silent, swift-as-a-shadow sentinel of a great city... Cat-like nemesis of injustice!" Fans responded, voting this story an Alley Award for Best Illustrated Strip (Amateur) of 1963. The Eclipse (in his origin, and the follow-up in *AE* #8 two years later) set a high standard of quality for other amateur writers and artists.

It would be hard to imagine a more impressive calling card for Foss (and Moroz) than the Eclipse origin, and yet Schwartz was strangely unresponsive. It's really a shame, since this was that "magic moment" when Ronn was ready and willing to make the transition to pro-dom. (The lack of response from New York publishers to this strip, in retrospect, may have taken a lot of wind out of Foss' sails. At least, he never set his sights as squarely on breaking into mainstream comics in later years.)

But the early 1960s was not a good time for amateur artists and writers to break into pro comics. The line dividing "amateur" and "pro" seemed as clearly defined as the Berlin Wall ... and nearly as difficult to cross. The industry had gone through a traumatic down-sizing in the late 1950s, and assignments for *established* pros were scarce.

So the amateurs like Foss, Green, White and others toiled in their spare time (after working all day in a regular job), often burning the midnight oil, to produce the strips that appeared in the fanzines. Their visions were as compelling as the pros, and their talent was undeniable. Yet they gave freely of themselves, asking nothing in return except, perhaps, a modicum of recognition for their labors of love.

From 1963 onward, articles on Golden Age comics would share center stage with the amateur comic strips. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that fans had the energy and drive, but not enough rare comics to write well-researched articles. Many more

seemed to have the talent to create credible heroes and heroines. What comic book collector hasn't dreamed up a few of his or her own characters?

The first fanzine devoted entirely to the amateur comic strip was G. B. Love's *Fighting Hero Comics*, beginning in April 1963.

Many of the early issues of *Fighting Hero Comics* printed strips by a young talent in Arlington, Texas, named Buddy Saunders, who was doing a lot of work for Love's *Rocket's Blast*. Buddy was fourteen years old in 1961 when he became involved in fandom after receiving *A-E* #2, and soon became a fan-editor with *The Comic Fan* #1 (July 1962) which introduced his premiere fan character, the Demon.

In that origin issue, Dan Prat's friends are mysteriously killed while exploring caves. Prat comes across the underground sanctum of the ancient medieval sorcerer Geraldin. He discovers the secrets of the dead sorcerer and thus becomes the Demon. Saunders wrote, "My Demon, an ordinary man made extraordinary by his possession of supernatural lore, was an outgrowth of influences from the books I was reading (Lovecraft, etc.). More interesting and original was his primary enemy, the Chimera, a creature that sprang into being as the consequence of the Demon's own nightmares." The Demon bears a superficial resemblance to Marvel's Doctor Strange, but predates him by a year.

After his origin in *The Comic Fan*, the Demon moved over to inaugurate *Fighting Hero Comics*. He appeared in #1, 2, 6 and 9, and eventually also headlined strips in *Komix Illustrated* #7, 11 and 12, as well as *Fighting Hero Comics Special Edition* #1.

Also in *FHC* was "Jon Jarl of the Space Police" written by Eando Binder (really Otto Binder) and drawn by Bill Spicer (#3), based on the text-story "World of Vampires" from *Captain Marvel Adventures* in the 1940s; "The Black Scorpion" written by Raymond Miller and drawn by Howard Keltner (#4); "The Crusader" by the team of Phil Liebfred and Alan Weiss (#5); "The Bolts of Justice" by Ken "Kente" Tesar (#8); and "Velvet of Venus!", the last Dimension Man strip, both written and drawn by Ronn Foss (#12).

By the time *Fighting Hero Comics* had completed its initial twelve-issue run in 1964, it had been superseded by one of the most widely read and fondly remembered fanzines from the 1960s, *Star-Studded Comics*. Within a short period of time, SSC established itself as virtually the "official showcase" of the amateur super hero strip. It was published by Howard Keltner, Larry Herndon, and Buddy Saunders, known collectively as the Texas Trio. The first issue carried a September 1963 cover date, but was actually mailed in June.

Howard Keltner recalled, "I had noticed Buddy's artwork in *The Rocket's Blast* ... and noted that he lived only a short distance away from me [in Texas]. Then in late 1962, Larry [Herndon] wrote me requesting an article for his zine *Hero*. We were spending a lot of time writing letters to each other in early 1963. Larry finally suggested that we get together and really get acquainted, and since it was his idea we agreed to meet in his home in April."

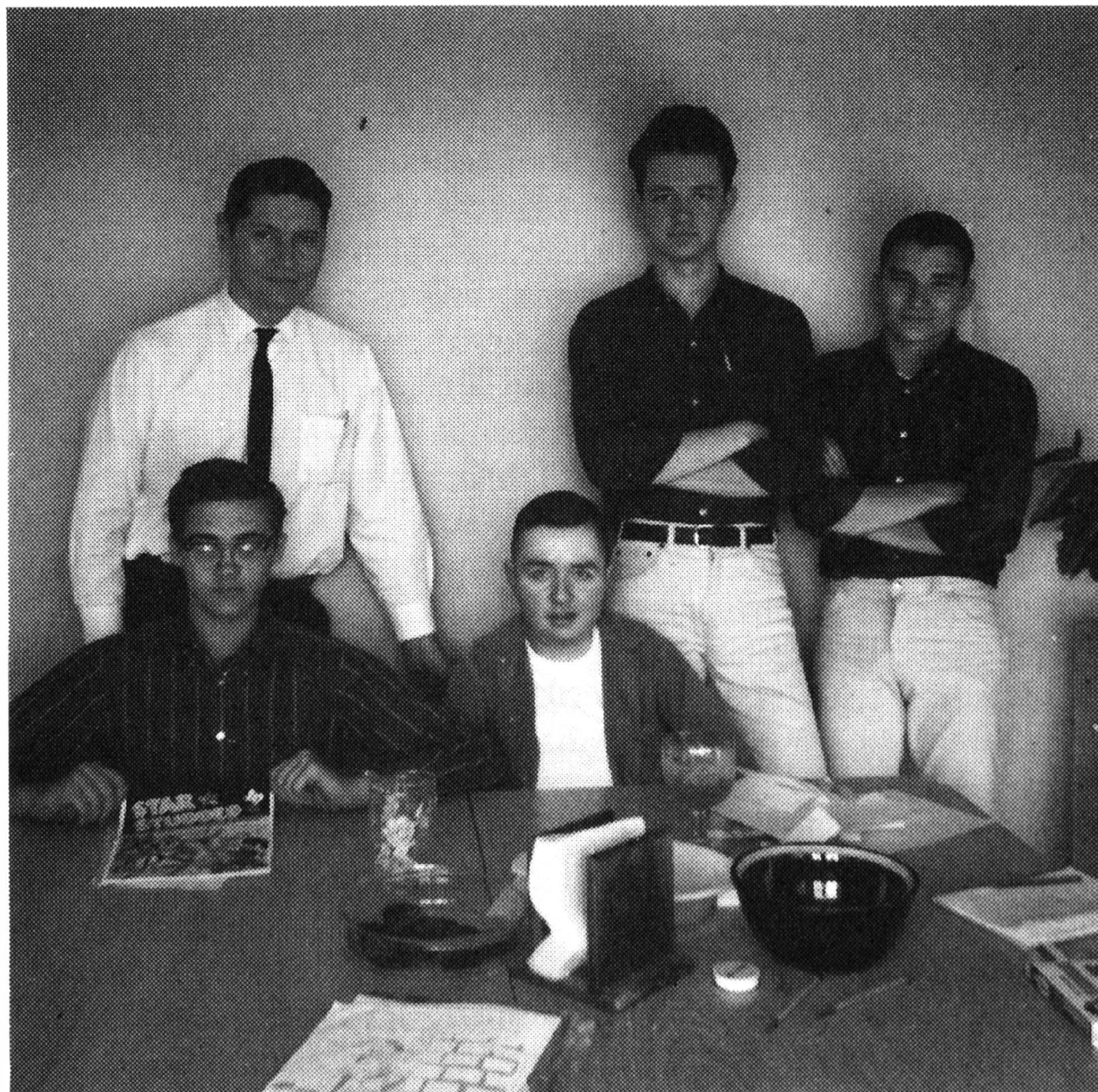
"I was still too young to drive," Buddy Saunders remembered, "but I talked my mother into driving me to Carrollton where Larry lived with his folks. Larry's mom and dad were both school teachers and very nice." Herndon had a room toward the front of the house that was devoted solely to his comic collection. Neat stacks of comics were on shelves along the wall or in boxes. It was there, sitting around a folding card table in the house on Highland Drive that Larry and Buddy started talking about doing a fanzine together.

Then Howard Keltner was welcomed into the comic book sanctum. Keltner, aptly described as "a real Southern gentleman," brought the perspective of a fan of Golden Age comics to the table. He was fifteen years older than Buddy and Larry. "I was the last to arrive and one of the first things I learned was that they had already been discussing publishing an amateur strip zine," Keltner recalled. Right then and there, *Star-Studded Comics* was born, with Keltner suggesting the title. *Star-Studded Comics* #1 (June 1963) introduced Dr. Weird (art and story by Keltner), the Changeling (story and art by Saunders), the Defender (by Herndon and Grass Green) and the Astral Man (by Tommy Fisher). #2 added two more: Keltner's Powerman, and Saunders' Mercury. As the cast of characters grew, some of them inevitably stood out from the crowd.

"From the moment I first laid eyes on the cover of *Blue Ribbon Comics* #15, Mr. Justice was my favorite character," Keltner remembered. "Doctor Weird was created very soon after that. For years I drew stories of him in pencil on typing paper, all crude of course."

THE
DEMON



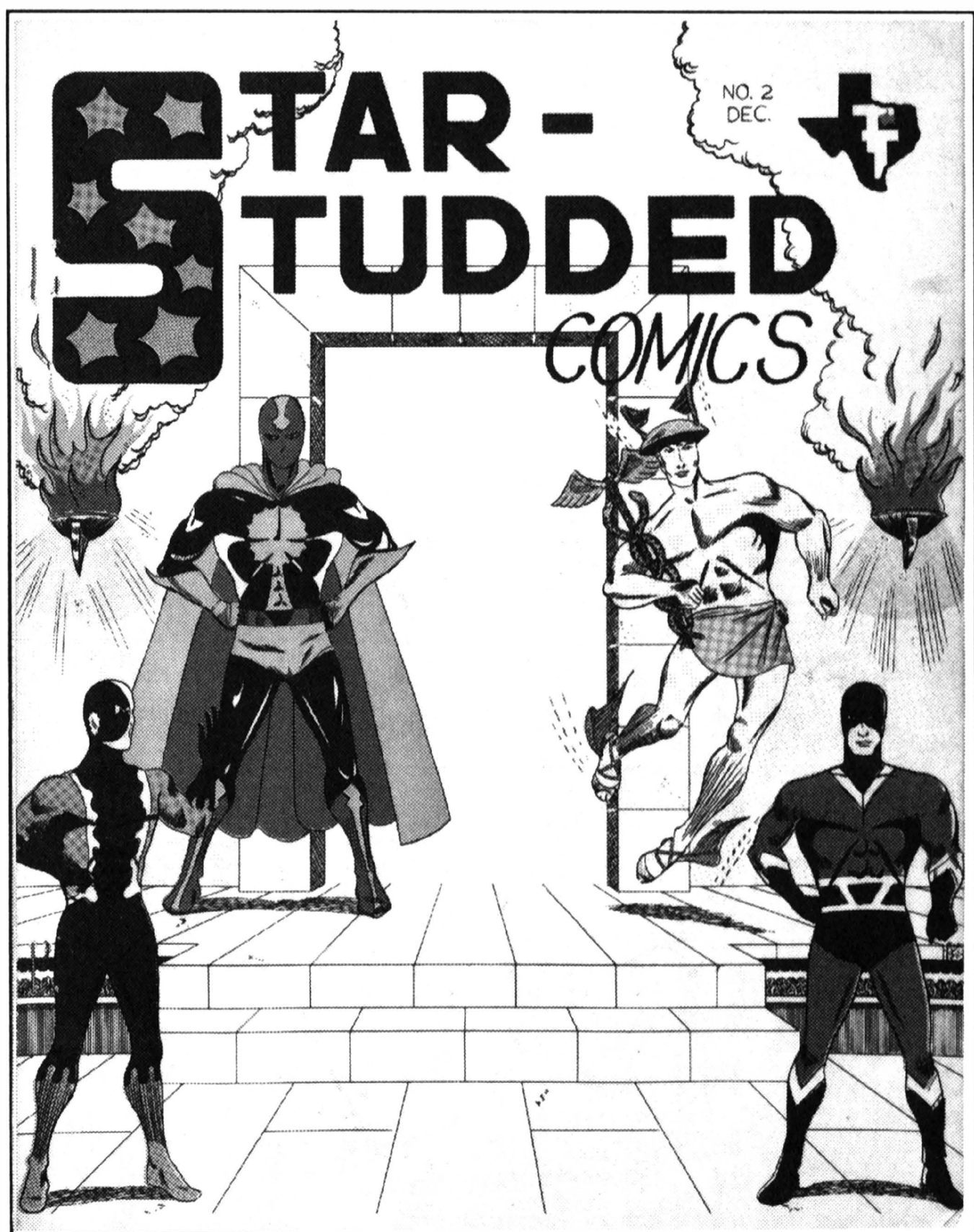


The Texas Trio

Howard Keltner, Buddy Saunders, Howard Waldrop, with Gary Acord and Larry Herndon. Waldrop and Acord were "unofficial" members of the Trio.



Only appearance of the Liberty Legion (SSC #4).



Buddy Saunders' cover to Star-Studded Comics #2 (1963) with (left to right): Changling, Powerman, Mercury and the Defender. Circulation: 275 copies.



In Larry's "comic book room" at the Herndon house, the Trio often met to plan the next issue of Star-Studded Comics. Behind a seated Larry Herndon is Howard Waldrop, and Howard Keltner (right).

Even though he was an out-and-out copy of the Mr. Justice concept, a supernatural hero engaged in combat with supernatural foes, I gave him a different origin and didn't copy any of the Mr. Justice stories."

The six-page origin strip in SSC #1 was written and drawn solely by Keltner. The art, in particular, was a stand-out in its day: extremely neat and meticulous (a Keltner trademark), it bore an attention to detail that was rare among ditto strips.

"Introducing Doctor Weird" tells the story of futuristic time traveler Dr. Rex Ward, who leaves his beloved wife Erla in 2013 to travel back to 1963. As he exits his time machine, Ward is killed by two burglars in the home where he has materialized. Yet his spirit is denied entrance to heaven. A disembodied voice proclaims, "You have died before you were born, and such cannot be. You must return to earth, there to remain for the next fifty years, whereupon you will be allowed to cross the gulfs to your final resting place." In the interim, Rex Ward is given supernatural powers to combat evil. This the newly named Dr. *Weird* does, tossing the car containing the burglars off a cliff, grimly muttering, "It's better that such vermin do not exist!"⁴

One of the beautiful things about fandom was that physically challenged individuals could become giants in the fan community. G. B. Love was one example, and so was Larry Herndon of the Texas Trio. Herndon had muscular dystrophy and was generally confined to a wheelchair (though he could get around on crutches). Small of frame, and possessing genuine humility, Larry was one of fandom's most prolific writers and organizers. Editor of *Hero*, *Batwing* and later *The Nostalgia News*, Herndon wrote hundreds of articles, letters and ama-strips. The primary character he invented for *Star-Studded Comics* was the Defender.

Appearing in ten of SSC's eighteen issues, the Defender was in reality District Attorney Carl Reed. He received powers of super strength, the ability to fly and

partial invulnerability by an alien named Val-lo, and vowed to use those powers to combat crime in ways not available to a D.A. Although the Defender's debut was a text story, with illustrations by Grass Green, the follow-up in SSC #2 was fully illustrated by Green and Keltner. Perhaps the best Defender tale was Reed's encounter with beautiful villainess Crystal Stone in SSC #7 by Al Kuhfeld and Dick Tatge.

One of comicdom's most striking ama-heroes came about through a curious process of creative cross-pollination. Biljo White had drawn a spur-of-the-moment character called the Eye for a pin-up in an issue of Ronn Foss'

Comickollector; as a result, Ronn sent Biljo a sketch of a character by the same name. "Grass Green created him back in high school about 1954, and drew a 'character card' as we called them," Foss wrote. "When I first saw [Grass' Eye] I liked the costume so much I wanted to do a story of him ... which I happened to have along with me when I visited Biljo last March."⁵ Biljo became so fascinated with the character he described as "this weird-looking man with the huge single eye" that he originated a story idea for the character, and submitted it to the Texas Trio. Although the Trio had initially wanted to keep the number of new characters in SSC



Emblematic page from "Introducing The Eye" - The Eye #1 (1965)



Golden Gate Features

Bill Dubay, Marty Arbunich, Rudi Franke and Barry Bauman lived in the Bay Area, and teamed up to form an amateur publishing group soon after they introduced their respective fanzines, Fantasy Hero and Heroes' Hangout. In 1964 and 1965, their fanzines were among the most popular in comicdom. One of the keys of their appeal was the art talent of Dubay, whose Infantino-influenced work was always neat and attractive, as can be seen below in the cover for Fantasy Hero #4 (Summer 1964), the final issue.



to a minimum, they couldn't pass up this outstanding effort on White's part.

In the first eight-page tale, we meet the Eye, a fearsome underworld executioner, who is in reality working for the police. After supposedly executing a criminal, the Eye protects his secret by administering an amnesia injection and sending his victim into seclusion at Safehaven, an upstate rest home.

The Eye, which reverberates with echoes of the pulps and the frightening early adventures of Batman, evidenced an artistic sophistication that showcased White at the peak of his powers as a writer/artist. The character as presented is truly frightening, and intriguingly developed in the follow-up "The Eye Unmasked" that ran in *Fighting Hero Comics* #10 (June 1964). So popular would the Eye become, he headlined two photo-offset fanzines from the White House of Comics. His long-awaited origin appeared in *Capt. Biljo Presents* #2 (1969), telling how an undercover cop became the dreaded underworld executioner through a twist of fate.

Though the first three ditto issues of *Star-Studded* offered above-average material, SSC really made its mark by switching to all-offset printing with #4, making it the first professionally printed fanzine devoted entirely to ama-heroes. This occurred in June 1964, and the issue unveiled the Liberty Legion, a team of the Trio's heroes: Doctor Weird, Changling, Mercury, Powerman, Astral Man and the Defender. Written by Herndon and Saunders, with chapters illustrated by the best of fandom (Foss, White, Green, Saunders and Keltner), it was a kind of ultimate achievement in ama-strips. The story was along the typical lines of the Justice Society and Justice League stories, with the group splitting up into two-person teams for the middle chapters, only coming together at the beginning and end of the book-length tale.

During the summer of 1963, a copy of Ronn Foss' *Alter Ego* #5 had found its way to the mailbox of Bill Dubay, a recent "graduate" of St. Paul's grammar school in San Francisco, California. "When I got that, it blew my mind," Dubay recently remembered. Suddenly realizing that there were old comic books and super heroes published long before his current favorites, Bill immediately began treasure hunting for old comics in the Bay Area, and planning to publish his first amateur magazine.

Dubay was joined in this effort by his friend since first grade at St. Paul's, Marty Arbunich. "Marty and I were best friends," Bill said. "We would go on perpetual scavenger hunts for old comics. There probably wasn't a day, even on weekends, that Marty and I didn't see each other. We were like 'joined at the hip' at that point."

If Dubay had a sarcastic, somewhat subversive sense of humor, Arbunich was notable for his boundless enthusiasm. Marty recalled, "For me, it seemed like I would have been happy just hunting for old comic books for the rest of my life."

"We loved the medium," Bill said. "'Look at this story! Look at this art!' Two kids just getting off on this stuff. In the throes of puberty, when our glands should have been going wild in some other direction, it was for what we thought was this artistic medium. Our orgasm was when something great would happen

in comics. 'Carmine Infantino is going to draw *Batman* now?? Wow! I'm going to start collecting *Batman*!!' "

The first issue of *Fantasy Hero* (September 1963), printed on a ditto machine at Sacred Heart High School (another all-boys Catholic school), contained three amateur comic strips. The first, which demonstrated Bill Dubay's penchant for putting himself (and Marty) into his strips, was "Billy De," a fourteen-page opus that showed the influence of Infantino on Dubay's budding art style. It also demonstrated Bill's knack for working in ditto right from the start, including employing all the available colors. Soon, he would become one of fandom's acknowledged "masters of the ditto master."

Dubay quickly enlisted Arbunich into the role of co-editor. "After doing the first issue, I thought, 'Hey, if I can con *anybody* into helping me, I will. This is hard work.' "

For his part, Arbunich was excited simply by the idea of publishing something on his own. As Marty put it, "Even though comics were interesting for me, what was even *more* interesting was the production end of it. *Making something!*" Dubay and Arbunich teamed up to produce *Fantasy Hero*, contributing a mix of articles and strips to the fanzine milieu. In its four issues, *FH* included several more strips: "Dr. Law and Shady," "The Invincibles," and "Live Wire" by Dubay. In "Live Wire," the hero announces his intention to Bill and Marty that he is leaving their fanzine, only to come crawling back in the end, after being defeated by Dr. Satan. This kind of fannish, tongue-in-cheek strip endeared Dubay and Arbunich to their readers.

Originally Bill and Marty did most of their production work in Bill's bedroom, but when they acquired a ditto machine of their own, they set it up in the basement of Marty's house, establishing their own print shop. "We spent a *lot* of time down there, just grinding it out, with reams and reams of paper," Marty said. Somewhat to their own amazement, *Fantasy Hero* and its spin-offs were quite popular, and they had to provide a lot of copies to satisfy the demand.

One of Bill and Marty's early treasure hunts hit a memorable jackpot. Arbunich remembered, "Our biggest find ... was at a store on 24th Street called Al Fry's Five-and-Dime. Al hadn't been open in twenty-five years, but there was a little sign in the window that said, 'If you need assistance, call Al in the alley.' So, we decided to call him. We yelled '*Alllll!*' Fifteen minutes later, this old guy came down and said, 'What do you want?' We asked if he had any comics. He said, 'Oh, I think I've got a few.' We wound up with about a *hundred* copies of *Detective Comics* #59, all in perfect mint condition, at a price of two for a nickel!" Marty and Bill traded them for everything under the sun for months after that.

Meanwhile, another Bay Area fan named Rudi Franke launched *Heroes' Hangout*, which also showcased a few ama-strips. Franke, a high school art teacher in Oakland, was a talented artist in his own right, and the proud owner of a complete set of EC comics. Then he met Barry Bauman, a younger fan who also lived in Oakland. They each amassed large collections of Golden Age comics when they discovered a goldmine of back issues at the Liberty Book Store in Sacramento. Naturally, Rudi and Barry kept the



Liberty a secret between them until they had acquired most of its vast inventory of old comics at forty and fifty cents a piece.

Rudi Franke and Barry Bauman visited Bill Dubay and Marty Arbunich at Bill's home on Chenery Street, to discuss their respective fanzines and comics in general. They began their ongoing basketball rivalry that day, too, and soon decided to form an amateur publishing "consortium" called Golden Gate Features. One of the first steps in their partnership was to merge *Fantasy Hero* and *Heroes' Hangout* into *Fantasy Heroes' Hangout*.

Another early project from Golden Gate was an encyclopedia of amateur heroes, heroines and groups that had been published in fandom up to that time, with half-page entries from all of comicdom's leading writers and artists. *Fandom Presents* (December 1964), which sold for the then-staggering price of \$1.25, listed almost two hundred characters! Over the next several years, ama-heroes would proliferate at such a rate that they could have filled several more volumes.

The epitome of variety in the amateur comic strip field was *Fantasy Illustrated*. That *FI* eschewed super heroes in its first three issues (save for parody) is due to the tastes and background of its editor and publisher, Bill Spicer.

As a comic fan in the early 1950s, Spicer had drawn a cover for the first real EC fanzine, *The EC Fan Bulletin* [see Chapter 1]. The intelligent stories and unmatched stable of artists at EC made a deep impression on him. By 1962, Spicer had become involved in the new fan movement, and conceived of a fanzine that would carve out its own unique territory.

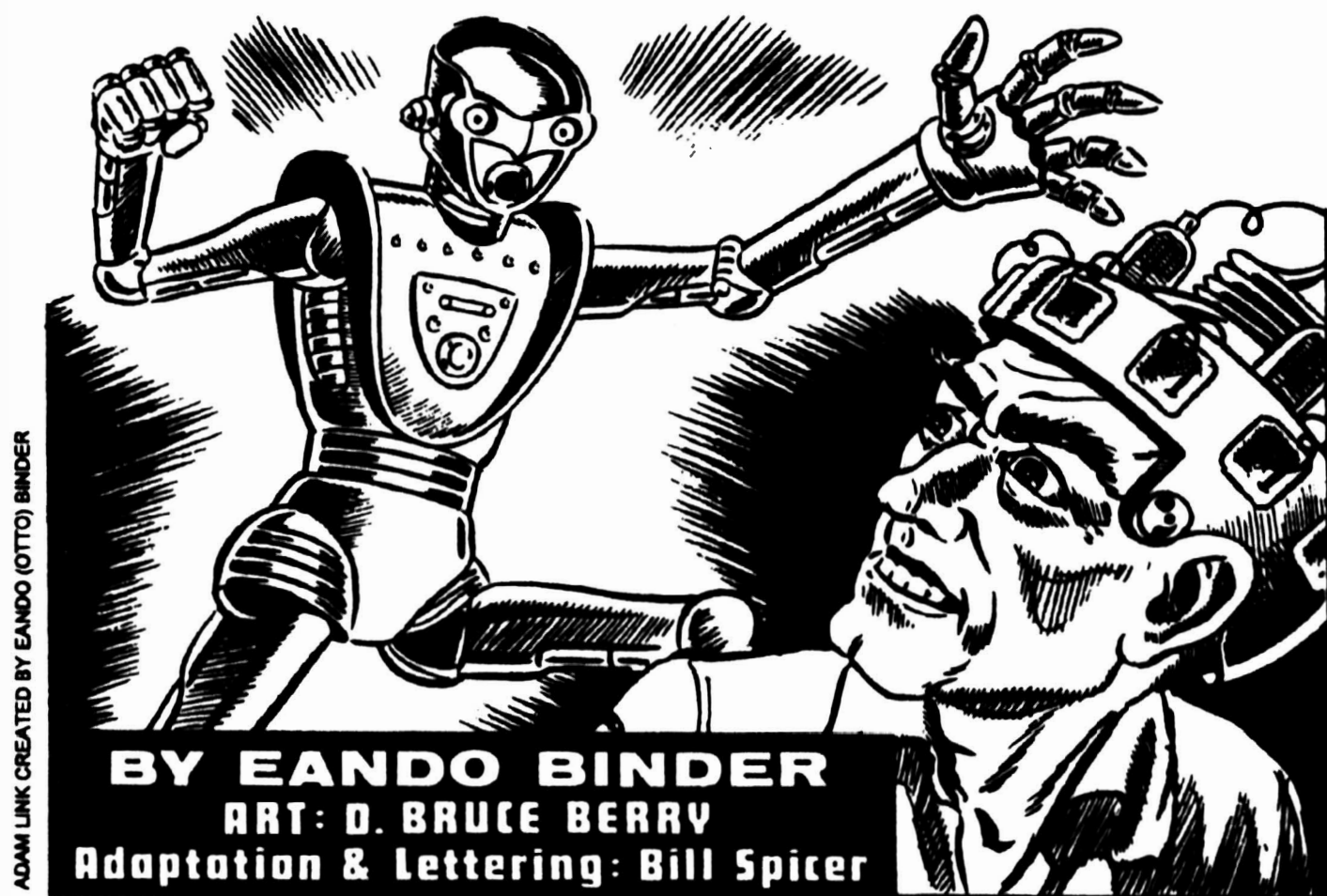
THE MUSEUM WAS QUIET. IT WAS ESPECIALLY QUIET IN THE EGYPTOLOGY ROOM WHERE NUMEROUS MUMMY CASES WERE ON DISPLAY. PEOPLE GENERALLY FEEL AWED IN THE PRESENCE OF ANTIQUITY AND THE SIGNS OF ANCIENT DEATH, AND THE FEW PERSONS WHO WERE IN THE ROOM THIS BRIGHT, SUNNY MORNING SPOKE IN WHISPERS, AS THOUGH FEARING TO WAKE THE LONG DEAD---



Above: Opening panel from "The Life Battery," Bill Spicer's adaptation of an Eando Binder story featuring art by the amazing Landon Chesney, from Fantasy Illustrated #2 (1964).

Below: Examples of two more comic strip adaptations, from Fantasy Illustrated #1 and #2 respectively; "Adam Linke's Vengeance" with art by D. Bruce Berry, and "The Invaders" with art by a young Joe Staton.

ADAM LINK'S VENGEANCE



ADAM LINK CREATED BY EANDO (OTTO) BINDER

TO ANY OF YOU HUMANS COMMITTING SUICIDE, YOUR LAST THOUGHT MUST BE THAT DEATH IS AFTER ALL SO SWEET AND PEACEFUL AND DESIRABLE. AND TO BE BROUGHT BACK FROM VOLUNTARY DEATH AT THE LAST SECOND MUST BE A TERRIBLY PAINFUL EXPERIENCE...



SO IT WAS WITH ME, THOUGH I AM A ROBOT...

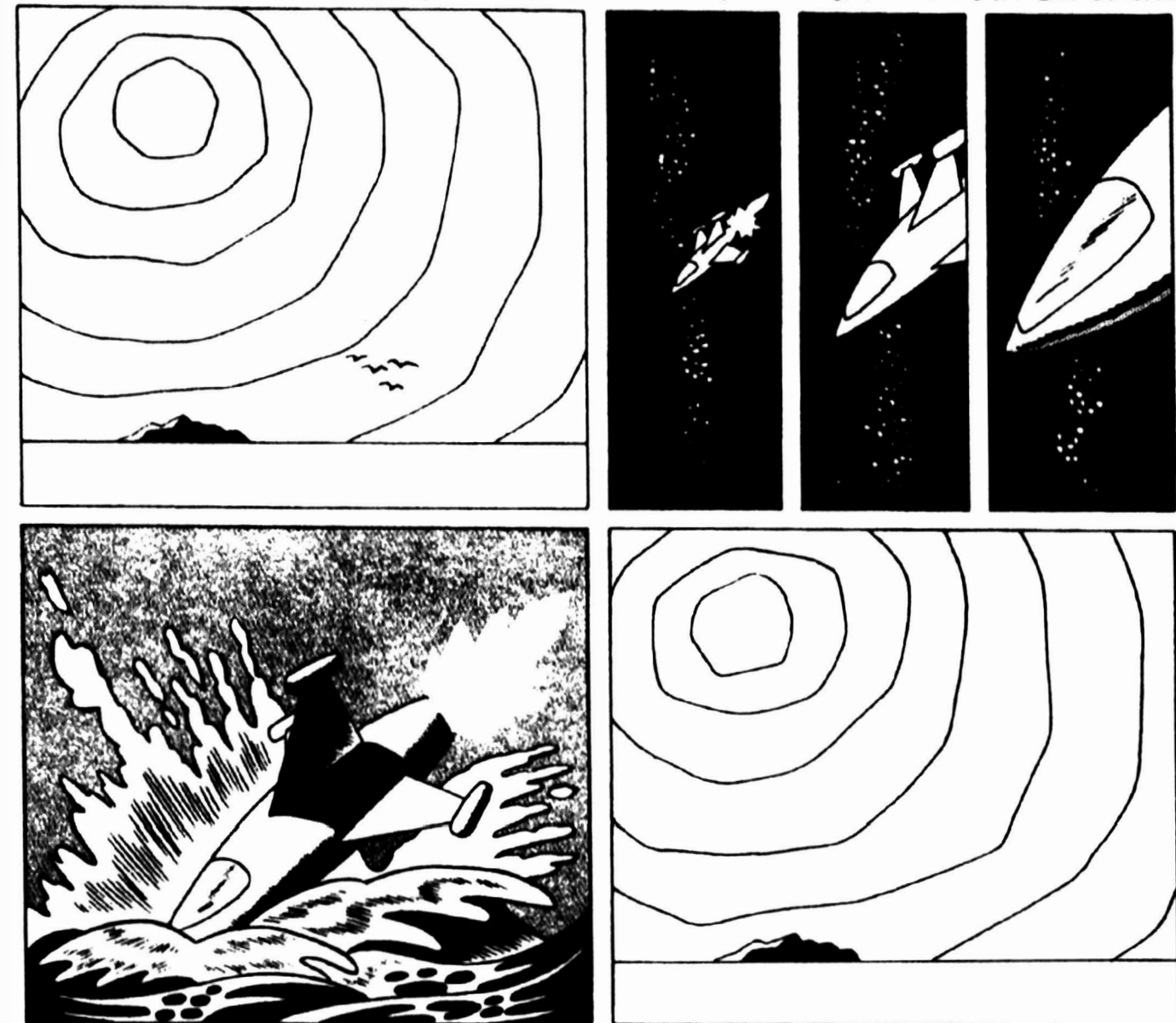


MY MIND BLINKED INTO CONSCIOUSNESS. FULL MEMORY FLOODED BACK-- WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO PREVENT MY DEATH? I HAD ALLOWED MY BATTERIES TO DRAIN, AND HAD LAIN MYSELF FLAT TO PASS INTO OBLIVION WITH THE LAST OF THE ELECTRICAL ENERGY...

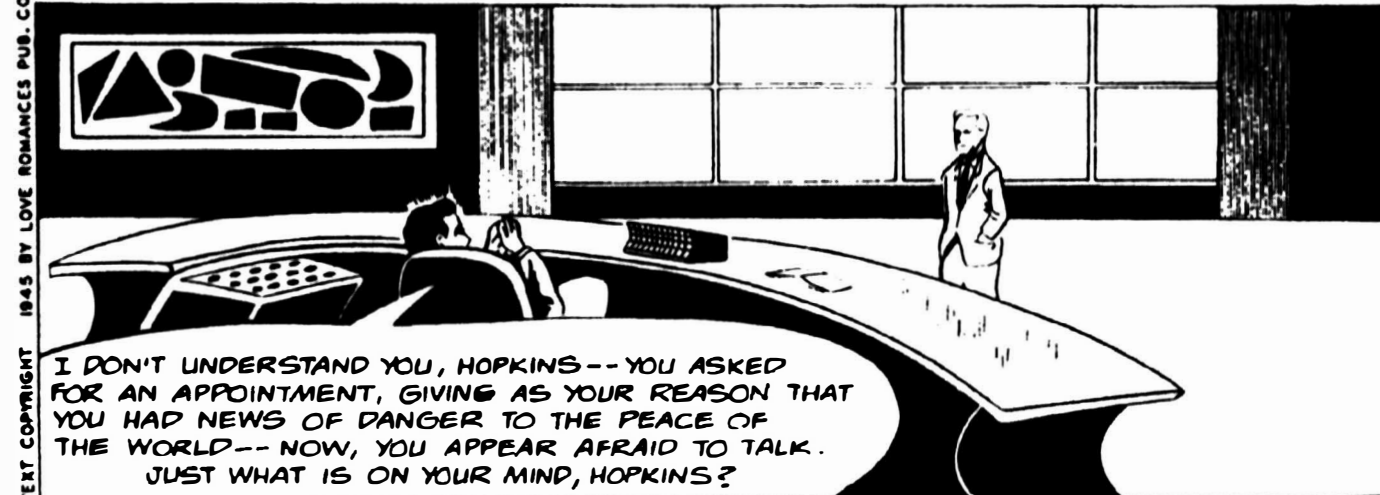


THE INVADERS

WRITTEN BY GAROLD S. HATFIELD / ART BY JOE STATON / INKING & LETTERING BY BILL SPICER



DAVID MANNERS, NEWLY-APPOINTED COMPTROLLER OF THE INTER-ALLIED WAR BUREAU, LEANED BACK IN HIS SWIVEL CHAIR, AND TENTED HIS FINGERS ON HIS LAP, WHILE KEEN GREY EYES STUDIED THE MAN WHO FIDGETED AWKWARDLY BEFORE HIM--



TEXT COPYRIGHT 1945 BY LOVE ROMANCES PUBL. CO.

When asked to pinpoint his motivation for publishing *Fantasy Illustrated*, Bill explained, "The big attraction of starting up a fanzine at that point, circa 1962, was the idea of having complete freedom to produce just about any kind of comics stories, unconcerned with real-world commercial inconveniences like newsstand distribution and sales. At the time, I apparently fancied myself a minor league William Gaines and Harvey Kurtzman rolled into one."

From the beginning, the all-offset *FI* (debuting in February 1964) delved into three of the four major genres of the New Trend stories: horror, sf, and parody. Also, like EC, *FI* frequently adapted stories from other media to comic strip form.

One of the most highly praised strips was Spicer's two-part adaptation of Eando Binder's 1940s novella, "Adam Link's Vengeance." Drawn by professional artist and sf fan D. Bruce Berry, it was a stunning tour de force. James Warren was a subscriber to *FI*, and commissioned the Adam Link stories for *Creepy* (to be drawn by Joe Orlando) after seeing the Binder/Spicer/Berry adaptation. For that reason, Spicer's plans for more Adam Link strips had to be abandoned. It's too bad, because the *Creepy* version was inferior to *FI*'s.

The other adaptations in #1 and 2 didn't fare as well. "The Moon Ants" from an sf story by Thornecliff Herrick (art by Buddy Saunders); "The Ancient Secret," a Jon Jarl adventure by Eando Binder (art by Alan Weiss); "The Invaders" written by Garold S. Hatfield (art by Joe Staton)—all were merely average. Although the art could have been better in each case, it was really the somewhat clichéd stories that held them back.

"*FI* probably owed as much if not more to science fiction fandom as it did to what constituted comic fandom at the time," Spicer recalled. "Considering the zine's title itself and an over-reliance on vintage pulp sf adaptations, rather than going after a full line-up of original fan-written stories, it's still somewhat surprising that it was that popular. The prevailing mode of the day was costumed super heroes, as far as most comics zines were concerned." *Fantasy Illustrated* #1 had a press run of 500 copies, and Spicer managed to sell or otherwise circulate every copy within a couple of months.

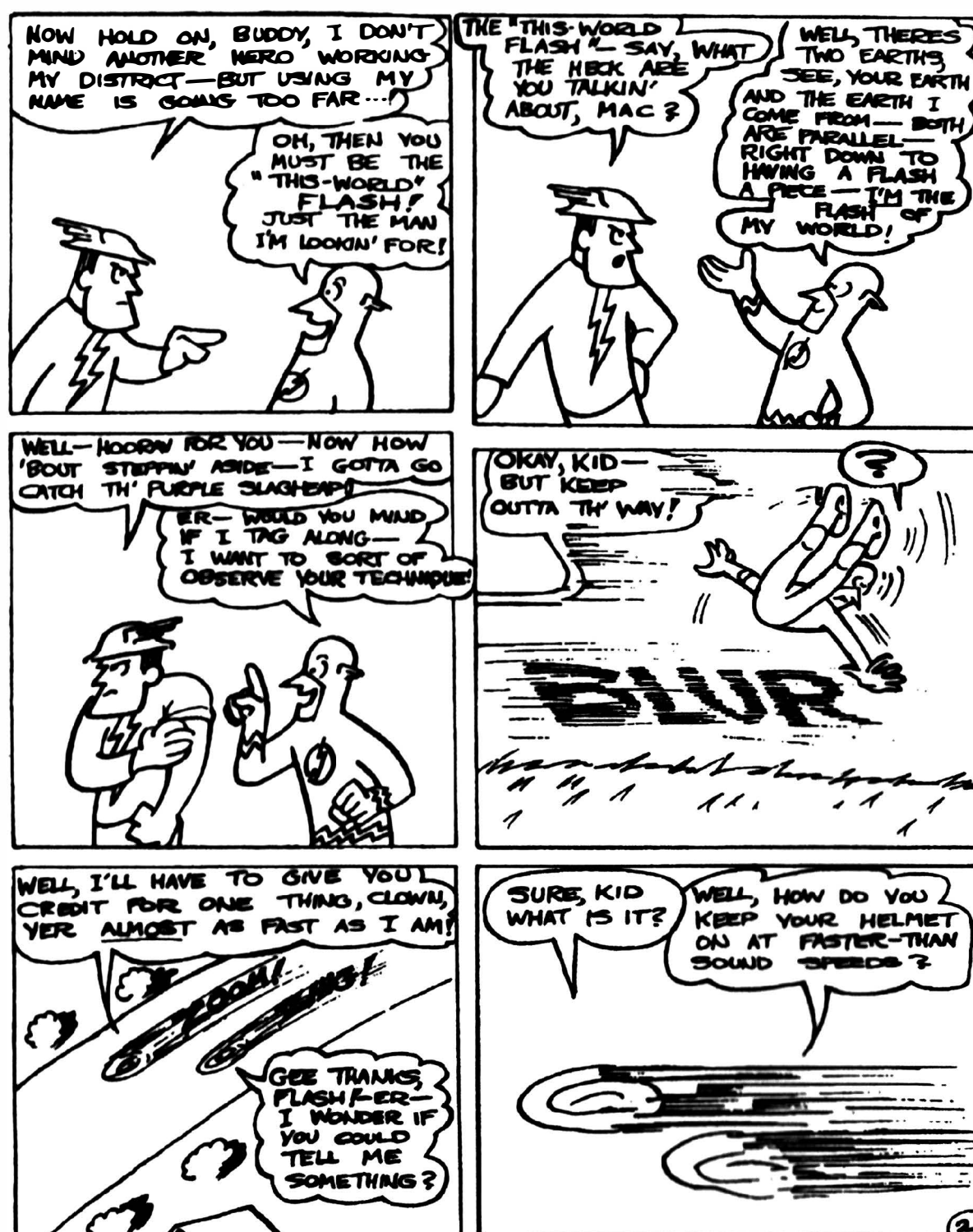
Good as much of the artwork in *FI* was, there is one artist who created an indelible impression in those early issues. That man is the uniquely talented Landon Chesney.

A craftsman whose work occasionally resembled that of EC's Johnny Craig, but in most respects was highly individualistic, Chesney blazed onto the amateur scene with the artwork to Eando Binder's "The Life Battery," a strip that qualifies as one of a handful of true fan classics.

Chesney was born in 1938 and grew up in Cleveland, Tennessee. After finishing his Air Force enlistment in 1960, Chesney by chance saw his first issue of *Xero*. "The first sight of [*Xero*], which featured a carefully stenciled figure of Batman ... hit me with an impact not unlike that described by Jerry Bails on beholding *All-Star Comics* for the first time." Such was his inspiration that Chesney impulsively concocted a parody of "The Flash of Two Worlds" entitled "Two



TWO FLASHES MEET THE PURPLE Slaghead! by Landon Chesney



LEE HACKETT REALIZED THAT DR. HENRY
HAD BEEN WRONG IN ONE THING -- LIFE
WAS NOT JUST CONSCIOUSNESS --



Last panel of "The Life Battery" in FI #2 (1964).

Flashes Meet The Purple Slagheap," and sent it to *Xero*. The Lupoffs loved it, and enlisted Bhub Stewart and George Scithers to help with color overlays and offset printing. The result (in *Xero* #10) was the first multi-colored offset strip in the fanzines, and one that gained a lot of attention for Chesney. This led very quickly to a number of connections in fandom, including Bill Spicer.

"The Life Battery" is about a scientist who discovers a way to animate dead things, like a museum mummy, only to realize first hand that there is more to life than simply consciousness. On this ambitious story canvas, Chesney fashioned a series of images of stunning craft and detail. His mastery of the interplay of light and shadow, as well as his excellent feel for heightened drama, made him the perfect artist for the story.

Dick Memorich, an artist in his own right, wrote to Spicer, "If you will study [Chesney's] art, you will discover that he is an exceptional cartoonist who 'feels' what he puts down in pen and ink. He isn't just 'drawing pictures.' It is evident that he has a deeper association with the imagination, a deeper understanding of human emotions ... the ability to create a mood. This is the quality which makes one cartoonist stand out over another, a handful stand out over hundreds. Chesney strikes me as being this type of cartoonist."⁶

What about strips designed to do nothing more than make us laugh? Over the upcoming years, there were many satires and parodies, and even whole fanzines devoted to nothing else. Just as there were fans whose serious artwork rivaled the pros at their own game, there were those especially skilled at drawing "funny stuff."

Besides, comicdom's straight strips rarely reached their full potential, because of the normal lack of follow-through in amateur publications. Often fans would get an origin, but no "regular" adventures. With humor, this wasn't a problem. Brevity was a virtue, and continuity was unnecessary.

One of the best known parodies was a spoof of Marvel's Fantastic Four called Da Frantic Four, by Ronn Foss and Grass Green. Da Frantic Four made their debut in Foss' *The Comicollector* #7 (September 1962). This "cover" to an issue of "The World's Greatless Comic Magazine" introduced us to the Human Scorch, Thang, the Invisibule Girl and Mister Frantic. In *CC* #8, Green handled the art chores for their first strip. It was here

that the talents of Green as a "funny" artist were introduced to fandom.

Despite the fact that only about a third of the strips he did for comicdom were in a humorous vein, Green was (at least initially) best known for his silly strips and cartoons. Maybe this was because others could do the regular super heroes as well, but few could match Green in the world of slapstick and farce. Often his parodies resembled *Mad* and *Panic*, and like Kurtzman, there was little subtlety to Green's figures, facial expressions and general approach. Instead, there was wild abandon. Green became Clown Prince of comicdom.

Thus, the team-up of Roy Thomas and Grass Green on "Bestest League of America meets Da Frantic Four" in *Alter Ego* #6 (March 1964) was a true fandom Event. The collaboration worked wonderfully, with characters drawn by Thomas and Green interacting together in the same panels. (Green finally had the chance to draw the Bestest League characters, along with numerous Marvel characters, when the BLA crossed over to pro comics in Charlton's *Go-Go* #5 and #6 in 1966, with scripts written by Roy's friend Gary Friedrich. Da Frantic Four also appeared here, as the Fantabulous Four—with the characters pretty much as they appeared in *A-E* and *CC*. These were the first known instances of an ama-strip's heroes making it into pro comics.)

Though he didn't draw entire comic strips, another artist who can't be overlooked is Jim Jones. Jones specialized in single gag-panels, or bizarre interpretations of well-known characters, in a style something akin to Basil Wolverton. Perhaps his best-known piece, "Blueprint For A Super-Hero!" appeared on the back cover for *Fantasy Illustrated* #4, but his work appeared in many zines from 1964 onward, and never failed to make fans laugh.

Many fanzines featured parodies, from the Herring brothers' *Odd* to Jay Kinney's *Nope* and Marv Wolfman's *The Foob*. The social pressures of conformity during the late 1950s and early 1960s created a need for release, and the subversive humor of Kurtzman and others provided one focal point. Another was the writing of Kerouac and Ginsberg. The spoof magazines of the early 1960s like *Wild*, *Jack High* and *Enclave* featured a lot of beatnik humor. They were filled with early work by Skip Williamson, Jay Lynch and others.

With the fanzine explosion of the first half of the decade, it wasn't unusual to find a fan trying his or her hand at a take-off of a favorite comic book. But, while fandom had its jesters, it remained dominated by the purveyors of super feats of derring-do.

Footnotes - Chapter 4

¹Jerry Bails, editorial, *The Comic Reader* #12, August 20, 1962.

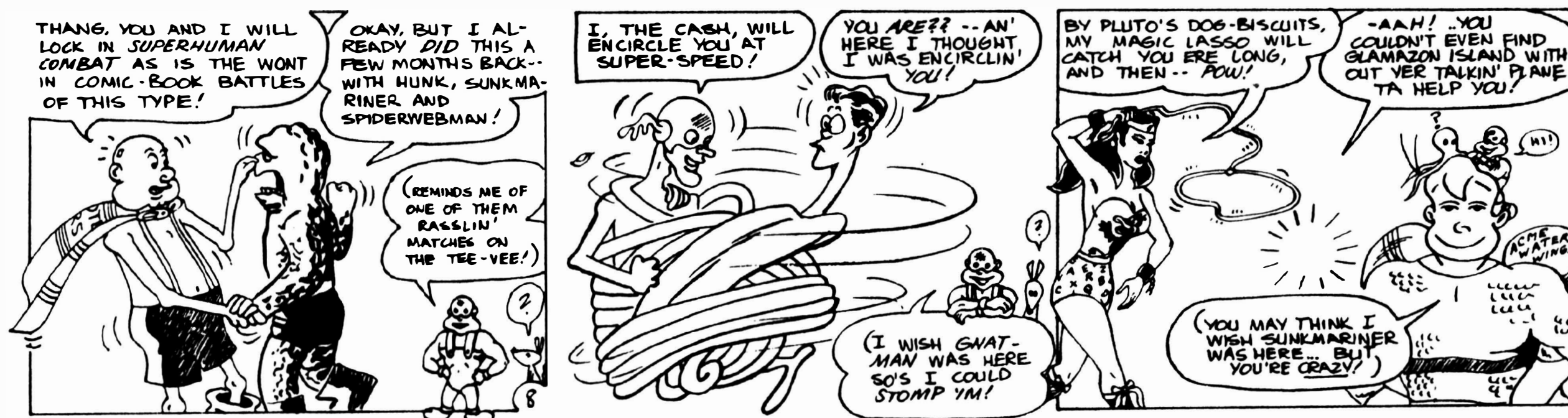
²Ronn Foss, letter, *The Comic Reader* #12, August 20, 1962.

³Richard Kyle, "The Education of Victor Fox," All In Color For A Dime, Part 8, *Xero* #8, 1962.

⁴Howard Keltner, "Introducing Dr. Weird," *Star-Studded Comics* #1, September 1963.

⁵Ronn Foss, *Dateline: Comicdom*, 1964.

⁶Dick Memorich, letter column, *Fantasy Illustrated* #3, 1964.



Above: Panels from "The Bestest League of America meets ... Da Frantic Four" by Roy Thomas and Grass Green, in *Alter Ego* #6 (1964).

Left: The first strip featuring Da Frantic Four by Grass Green, in *Comickollector* #8 (1962).

Right: Green's inimitable Speed Marvel from *Komix Illustrated* and other early fanzines.

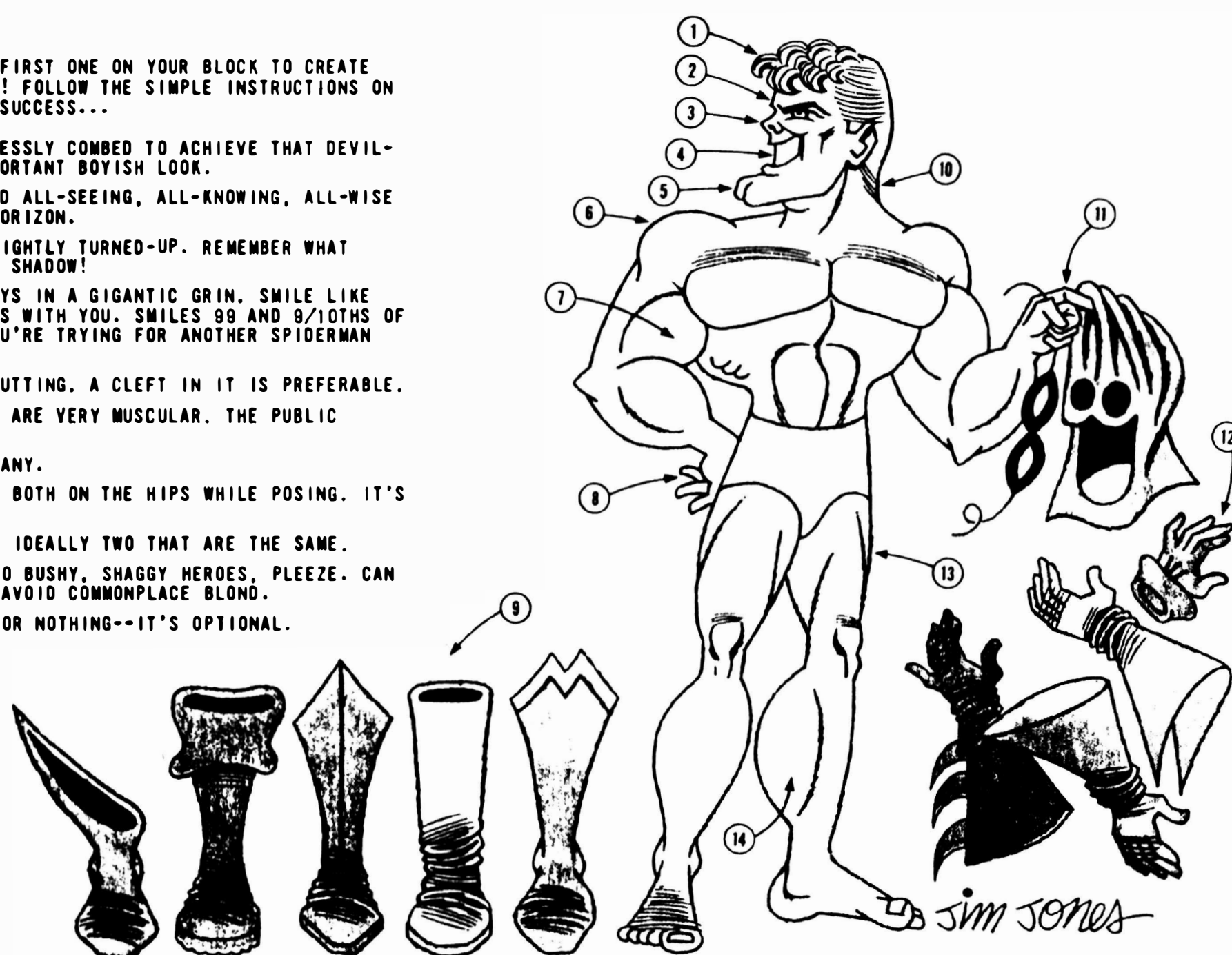


Blueprint For A Super-Hero! by Jim Jones

HEY THERE GANG, BE THE VERY FIRST ONE ON YOUR BLOCK TO CREATE YOUR OWN ORIGINAL SUPER-HERO! FOLLOW THE SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS ON THIS BLUEPRINT FOR COMPLETE SUCCESS...

- (1) FORELOCKS: MUST BE CARELESSLY COMBED TO ACHIEVE THAT DEVIL-MAY-CARE CASUAL, ALL-IMPORTANT BOYISH LOOK.
- (2) EYES: SHOULD BE CLEAR AND ALL-SEEING, ALL-KNOWING, ALL-WISE AND FIXED ON A DISTANT HORIZON.
- (3) NOSE: VERY BOYISH AND SLIGHTLY TURNED-UP. REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ORIGINAL SHADOW!
- (4) TEETH: STRAIGHT AND ALWAYS IN A GIGANTIC GRIN. SMILE LIKE THIS AND THE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU. SMILES 99 AND 9/10THS OF THE TIME UNLESS MAYBE YOU'RE TRYING FOR ANOTHER SPIDERMAN TYPE.
- (5) CHIN: FIRM, STRONG AND JUTTING. A CLEFT IN IT IS PREFERABLE.
- (6) MUSCLE: ALL SUPER-HEROES ARE VERY MUSCULAR. THE PUBLIC DEMANDS IT!
- (7) MUSCLE: ANOTHER ONE OF MANY.
- (8) HAND: ONE, OR PREFERABLY BOTH ON THE HIPS WHILE POSING. IT'S TRADITIONAL.
- (9) BOOT TYPES: PICK A PAIR, IDEALLY TWO THAT ARE THE SAME.
- (10) HAIR: ALWAYS TRIMMED. NO BUSHY, SHAGGY HEROES, PLEEZE. CAN BE RED, WHITE OR BLUE. AVOID COMMONPLACE BLOND.
- (11) MASK TYPES: HOOD, MASK OR NOTHING--IT'S OPTIONAL.
- (12) GLOVE OR GAUNTLETS: AGAIN, PICK A PAIR.
- (13) MUSCLE: ANOTHER.
- (14) MUSCLE: JUST ONE MORE.

COSTUME: UNFORTUNATELY FOR US, WE FORGOT TO INCLUDE A SAMPLE. MAKE UP YOUR OWN. OR--PLACE HOOD, GLOVE AND BOOT DIRECTLY ON FIGURE AND MAKE WAY FOR: SUPER SURFER! NEATO, HUH?



5

The Academy and *RB-CC*

From the moment Roy Thomas suggested an "Academy" of comic book fans in 1961, Jerry Bails' imagination was seized by the concept. It appealed to his desire to bring respectability to the hobby, as well as form an organization to share the responsibility and work involved in advancing the various goals and projects that Jerry had churning around in his fertile brain.

First conceived as a nominating board for the Alley Awards, its name was expanded by Bails to "The Academy of Comic-Book Arts and Sciences" on the first Alley nominating ballot, distributed in early 1962. Printed on that ballot was a list of duly-appointed members of the new Academy, consisting of twenty prominent fans.

The original twenty members of the Academy of Comic-Book Arts and Sciences were Jerry G. Bails, Bob Barron, Leonard Brown, Dale Christman, Wendell Davis, Rick Durell, Donald Foote, Ronald E. Foss, Irving Glassman, Ron Haydock, Howard Keltner, Ed Lahmann, Richard Lupoff, Douglas Marden, Raymond Miller, Frank Neussel, Fred Norwood, Roy Thomas, Don Thompson, and Bill J. White.

Maggie Thompson later noted, "I wasn't selected to be on the nominating committee of the Alley Awards. Don and I had been in the field the same length of time, had the same input, and Don was on the committee and I wasn't. And I said, 'Hm. Interesting.' "

Comidom in general first heard about the Academy when they received their Alley ballots that Spring, and next when the results were announced in *Alter-Ego* #4.

Jerry didn't bring up the subject again in print until *The Comic Reader* #18 (August 1963) when fans were asked to comment on the type of organization they would like for fandom. This would provide him with the input he needed to draft the first Academy charter. The proposed charter was mailed to ninety-two active fans, with a cover letter which began, "The time has come to set up the Academy on a constitutional basis. Therefore, I have drawn up a charter based on existing traditions and the hopes and aspirations of the hundreds of fans who responded to the questionnaire in *TCR* #18. This charter also reflects my own desire to establish the Alley Awards and *The Comic Reader* as institutions in comidom that will survive me. I hope too that this charter will lay the groundwork for other projects

that require institutional support."¹ Also in this cover letter, Bails announced that he had changed the name of the organization to "The Academy of Comic-Book Fans and Collectors," which he felt was less pretentious and more accurate.

The charter, which was resoundingly ratified, stated that the Academy would conduct the Alley Awards, publish *The Comic Reader*, endorse a Code of Fair Practice in the selling and trading of comic books, publish a directory of comic fans, encourage the formation of local chapters, endorse other fan organizations, assist in the effort to establish an annual comicon, and encourage participation in these functions by industry professionals. General membership in the Academy was free, and would be automatically conferred on those who voted in the annual Alley Awards poll. The charter established the position of Executive Secretary (which Jerry would hold, at first) and took steps toward setting up an elective Executive Board. Now, in its masthead, *The Comic Reader* was referred to as the "Official Newsletter of the Academy of Comic-Book Fans & Collectors." With a circulation of 800 fans and 200 pros, *TCR* gave the ACBFC name immediate currency.

About this time, *The Comicon* was about to change hands again. CC #12 had a circulation of over 600, a result of plugs in *Fantastic Four* (#15 and #18), *Mystery in Space* and Ron Haydock's *Fantastic Monsters*. (No wonder the ditto printing was rather light in places.) This was too much for Ronn, for the other two members of Triad had left him holding the bag. Foss decided that #12 (September 1963)—which ran sixty pages, for a mere 30 cents—would be his last issue. Page one featured the headline, "Under New Management," announcing that Biljo White would assume the duties of publishing *The Comicon*.

Joy Holiday handed over the reins of CC to Capt. Biljo on page one of #13 (October 1963). White wisely switched to mimeograph printing, which alleviated the problem of light copies, since mimeo doesn't become lighter as more copies are printed. Ad rates were still what they had been from the beginning: \$1.00 per quarter page.

Meanwhile, Bails was looking for someone to take over the responsibilities of *The Comic Reader*. There were a number of Academy projects on his plate that held greater allure. It has been observed that Jerry would no sooner establish one project than he would be ready to move on to another. That may be true, but he did remain at the helm of *TCR* for nearly three years, and published some thirty-five various zine issues in the first four years of comicon. Only G. B. Love could equal the number (if not the quality) of Bails' publications at that time.

The Academy required much attention. It had just established a treasury to be funded by Supporting Members, who would pay \$2.00 for the privilege of voting for or serving on the Executive Board, and to receive various fanzines at discounted prices. The Microfilm Lending Library of Comic Art was a dream Bails had long harbored (a forerunner of today's Microcolor concept) and a tremendously time-consuming task. Much of his correspondence around this time was involved in borrowing and returning rare comics after they were photographed on microfilm (and for his ongoing series of comic cover photographs, a precursor of Ernst and Mary Gerber's *Photo-Journal Guide to Comic Books*). Then there was the Academy Directory, the effort to establish a comic art Hall of Fame award, the design of an Academy seal, the Fair Code of Practice, ad infinitum. Bails was discovering that coordinating these numerous initiatives took all his energy and leadership; otherwise, he (and the Academy) would drown in a sea of arcane constitutional matters, proliferating motions, frequent votes and elections.

Therefore, at Jerry's request, Biljo agreed to merge CC with *TCR*. #15 (March 1964) was actually titled *The Comicon and Reader*. This was not to last for long. When Biljo (who had hoped to improve on Ronn's publishing frequency) realized how much work was involved in putting out an ad-zine, he decided it was not for him. He was also grieving over his mother's death at this time. #15 would be his last issue.

Would *The Comicon* die? It had burned out three of fandom's most capable editor/publishers in two and a half years. What about all the subscriptions that were unfulfilled?

Biljo White turned to G. B. Love. Would he be interested in taking over the reigns of CC?

It should be pointed out that Love had not, at first, been accorded much respect in comicon, due to the

COMICOM'S MOST WIDELY READ FANZINE

WEATHER - depends on one's outlook!

THE COMICCOLLECTOR

FINAL EDITION

No. 12 CIRCULATION: Over 600 \$1. MONTHLY Sept.-Oct., 1963

BEGINNING THIRD YEAR

This issue marks the end of CC's second year of publication. CC-1 is dated Sept., 1961... #7, Sept., '62. During this 24 month period over 360 different pages have been printed, with an overall total number of copies mailed out about 7,000; this is your guarantee of the largest possible readership for your comic want/ads and trade lists & ads. There are over 40 advertisers herein!

JOY TO STAY

Joy will continue to be your hostess through the pages of CC under the pen of Biljo, along with his own Capt. and Corporal Roy.

Readership Increase

I venture to say that not long from now CC will sport 700 circulation - then 800 ... and eventually, 1,000. Much of this new support must be accredited to the plugs in *Fantastic Four*, *Mystery in Space*, *Fantastic Monsters*, and those of you who've cared enough to recommend it.

"HEY, FOLKS!" says Joy Holiday as she snaps a salute to Roy Thomas (left) and Biljo White (center). - JOY

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Beginning with the next issue of CC (#13), Biljo White, former editor of the successful *KOMIX ILLUSTRATED*, assumes the duties of publishing CC. Along with the capable assistance of Roy Thomas, co-editor of *A-E* with originator J. B. Bails, your *COMICCOLLECTOR* will continue to be fandom's leading zine.

LITHO INSERT

As advertised, on page you'll find the bonus photo-offset page. This, as is many of CC's extras, a result of your preference; reader demand. I hasten to add that this sort of thing cannot be expected often, as it is very expensive, and the majority of readers, which must be heard, prefer to keep CC's cost as low as is possible.

Joy Holiday PORTFOLIO

Due to the many requests of new readers since CC-8, we decided to dig thru Joy's repertoire and present "The Best of Holidays," which we trust your regular subscribers won't mind seeing again!

INTERNATIONAL COMICON

French Comic fan, along with Italian enthusiasts, already plan a 1964 Comi-Con? See *Readers Action*.

Above: The *Comicon* #12, Foss' last issue as editor. Below: Biljo's last issue of CC was #15.

Volume 2, Number 3 - Whole Number 15 - March, 1964

No. 15

THE COMICCOLLECTOR

AND READER

Editor and Publisher - Billy J. White

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ATTENTION GANG!!

The NEW Batman is on his way. So watch for him in the issues of *DETECTIVE*, *BATMAN*, and *WORLD'S FINEST*. Let's get behind this all-time great and show DC what the power of organized fandom can do!

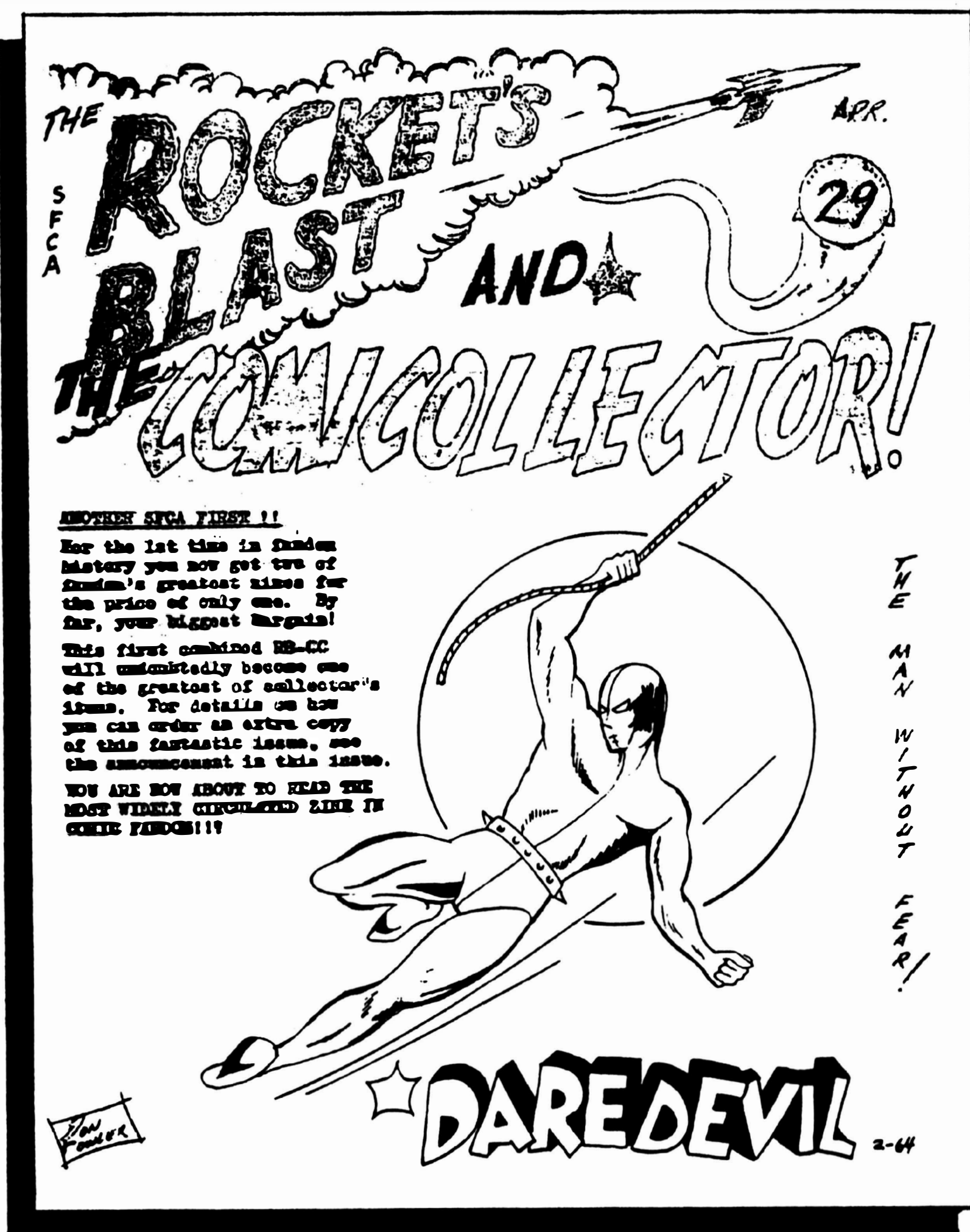
ACADEMY NEWS

(Executive Secretary: Jerry G. Bails, 22529 Karam Ct., Warren, Michigan 48091.)

SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIPS.

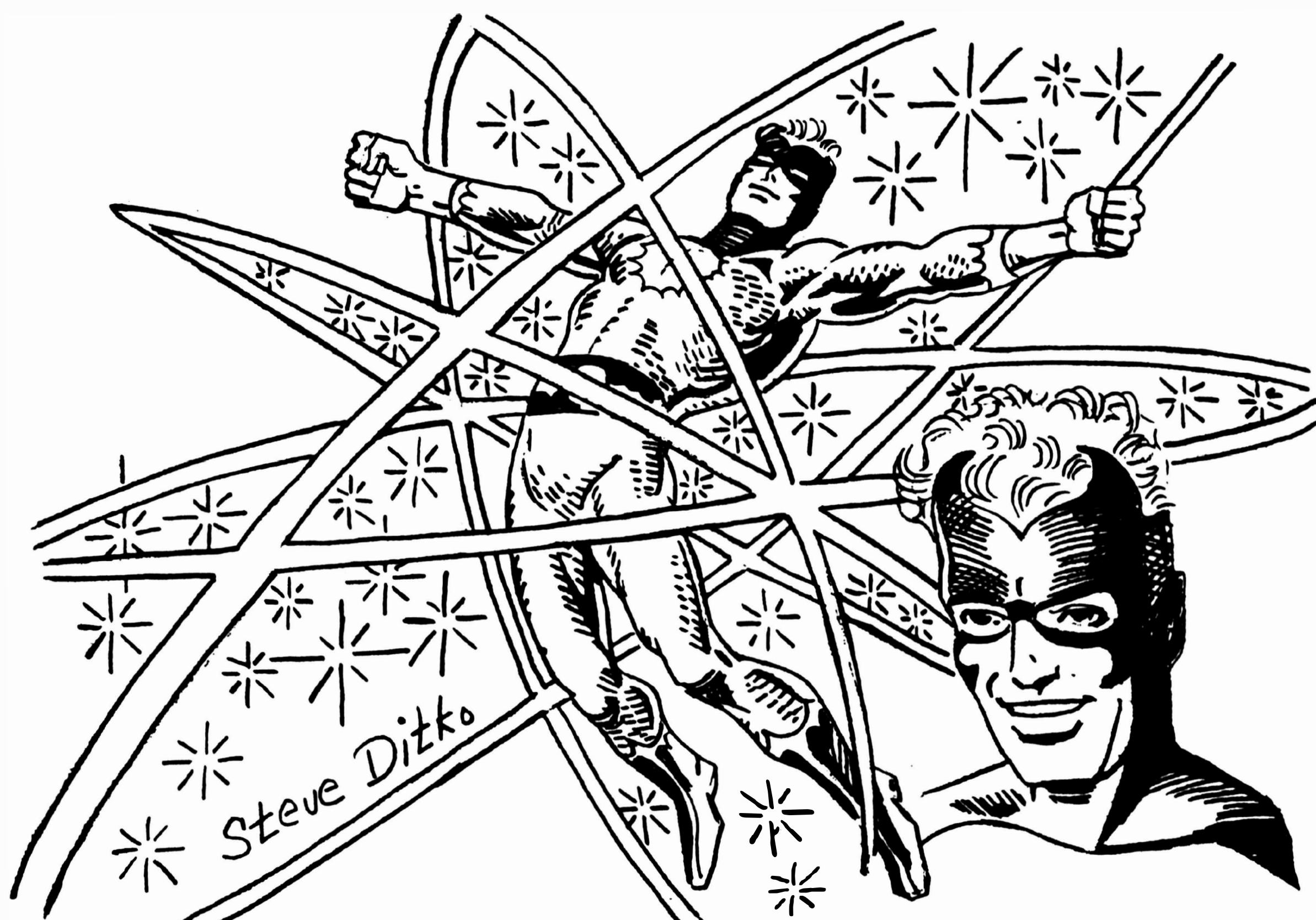
The Executive Board has overwhelmingly approved a proposal to establish an Academy Treasury and Supporting Memberships in the Academy. (This new type of membership is not to be confused with General Membership in the Academy, which is free and open to all.) An annual fee of \$2.00 (payable before June 1) will entitle the Supporting Member to:

- (1) The right to vote in the annual election of the Executive Board (to be held in late summer).
- (2) Eligibility for election to the Executive Board for a period of one year.
- (3) A complete listing in the Academy's Official Directory (scheduled for publication in the summer).
- (4) A copy of the Official Directory with supplements as they appear.
- (5) Reduced rates on special Academy publications, and other materials that will be made available (such as Academy stationery).
- (6) Official credentials which will entitle the



Left: RB-CC #29 brought the two major ad-zines together into a single powerhouse. Despite the slightly unwieldy title, G. B. Love's zine lasted longer than any other regular fan publication from the 1960s.

Below: Steve Ditko's sketch of Captain Atom from The Comic Reader #36 is just one of many drawings Steve did for the early ama-zines. Few professional artists were as supportive at this juncture. This drawing is reproduced from the original ditto master unit, courtesy of Glen Johnson.



crudeness of his earliest issues. He was neither a talented artist nor writer, or a particularly knowledgeable collector, and thus was not a part of fandom's inner circle, if it can be said there was such a thing. But he had acknowledged his shortcomings, and *The Rocket's Blast* had improved considerably during its second year of publication.

RB gradually attracted a talented group of young writers and artists, and had come up in the world. Rick Weingroff's "Rocketeer Gossip" proved to be well-written and popular with the fans; "Best of SF" by Robert Harner III was a mainstay; various features on Golden Age super heroes by Raymond Miller appeared with increasing frequency. With art by Buddy Saunders, Alan Weiss and Howard Keltner, and articles by Paul Gambaccini, Bill Spicer and others, the non-ad material was among the best fandom had to offer in 1964.

All had not run smoothly for G. B. Love. In early 1963, he suffered a major blow. Three weeks into January, a fire ravaged his office and comic book collection, leaving him badly shaken.

G. B. recounted the traumatic event recently. "I remember the night very well. We had a room that was adjacent to my house, where I had my office and about ninety percent of all my equipment, and my comics. It happened about 7:00 at night.

"I was in my house and I noticed smoke coming from my office door. When I opened the office door, the flames flared up. My Dad grabbed a water hose and got it pretty much under control by the time the Fire Department got there. But by then most everything had either been destroyed by fire or ruined by water. That included my desk, typewriter, printing equipment and supplies, material for the next *Rocket's Blast* (#16), and my comic collection, which included two copies of *Fantastic Four* #1.

"The one thing that I had kept in my bedroom was my subscription files. Still, that night I was utterly devastated. I cannot begin to tell you how demoralized I was and I could not comprehend trying to continue to publish. But, by the next morning I re-grouped and, with the help of several contributors ... and a little

insurance money, I got going again and was only about two weeks late with *RB* #16."

As *The Rocket's Blast* passed issue #20, its circulation had reached two hundred copies, and the number of pages of ads had increased substantially. Advertisers were attracted to *RB*'s record of on-schedule publication, month after month.

In *The Comickollector* #15, White's last issue, Love responded, "When Biljo first approached me with the idea of taking over *CC* I felt extremely honored to have been asked because, as we all know, *CC* has been one of the mainstays of fandom.

"My first thought was to publish *CC* as a separate zine and charge the same price for it—30 cents per copy, and to have the same ad rates ... and so on. However, I hit on an idea I think all my regular *RB* readers and the regular *CC* readers will be very happy about—I'm going to publish both zines and staple them together into one issue, and yet, *now get this*, you will pay only the regular price of the *RB* (35 cents per copy).

"Some of my main objectives will be: to make sure that *CC* retains its own separate identity (both zines will be sectioned off, except for the ads which, of course, will appear throughout both zines); to try and revive some of the things that made *CC* so popular in the past—the first of these will be the "Hall of Fame" series, which Biljo White will handle; to continue to come out on a monthly basis, which I consider to be *extremely* important; to bring all the latest news about upcoming comics direct from the editors via Jerry Bails' *Comic Reader*, which will appear regularly in *CC*. Biljo tells me that he, Ronn Foss, and Roy Thomas will also all be regular contributors. And also, *CC*, like the *RB*, will be ditto.

"I know I have promised you a lot and I know it must sound too good to be true but I don't believe I have promised you anything I can't fulfill." Love also agreed to honor all *CC* subscriptions, thus absorbing *CC*'s customer base.²

Thereby lies the tale of the fateful merger between *The Comickollector* and *The Rocket's Blast* resulting in the now legendary *Rocket's Blast-Comickollector* (*RB-CC*). With #29

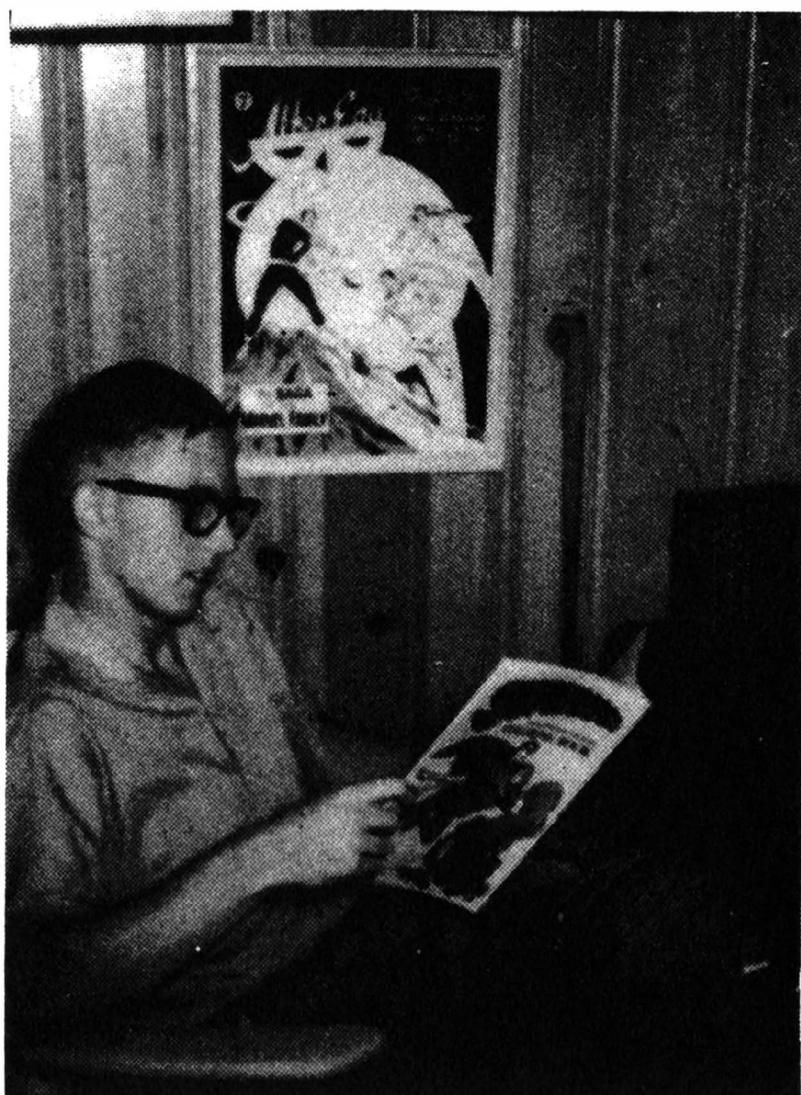
(April 1964), the first double-issue debuted, with the cover (of the Golden Age Daredevil by Saunders) sporting the blurb, "For the 1st time in fandom history you now get two of fandom's greatest zines for the price of only one." True to his word, Love had a separate *CC* section starting at about the halfway point.

As far as *The Comic Reader* also being incorporated into *RB-CC*, in *TCR* #23 (March 1964) Bails wrote to the Executive Board of the Academy of Comic-Book Fans & Collectors, "Shall we accept G. B.'s offer, or does someone have a better proposal? Will *TCR* survive as a separate publication as it was originally handled, or will it be relegated to a second-order existence in another fanzine as a kind of foster child?"³ Bails' position was clear, and shortly thereafter Glen Johnson volunteered to publish *TCR* with Academy help; otherwise it, too, would likely have become part of *RB-CC*. (Johnson's first issue was *TCR* #26.)

At first, even G. B. Love was daunted by the amount of work involved (simply the amount of printing and collating was staggering) and was forced to briefly go to a bi-monthly schedule. "It became a full time job," he said. "I usually worked on the *RB-CC* from about 8 p.m. to about 2 or 3 a.m. I found I got more done working at night. I lived with my parents at the time and my set-up took about two-and-a-half rooms." Soon he returned to a five-week or monthly schedule. The circulation grew to seven hundred, then eight hundred and in 1966 topped one thousand. By Love's own reckoning, he received *four hundred* inquiries from a plug in *Justice League of America* #30 (September 1964).

By this time, *RB-CC* had become a modestly profitable enterprise. Love recalls, "For the next ten years, *RB-CC* was my primary source of income. I am a firm believer in the capitalistic system and make no apologies for it." Indeed, some short-sighted fans scorned Love's profit-oriented ethic. Yet, the fact that the magazine could turn a profit provided an impetus for continuous publication, and in large part accounted for *RB-CC*'s incredible longevity.

Love himself has acknowledged the importance of the role that *The*



Roy Thomas with the original cover to *Alter Ego* #7 by Biljo White, one of Roy's most treasured mementos of his fannish days.

Comicollector played in the eventual success of the double-zine. He calls the merger "the first major highlight" in the history of *RB-CC*. Possibly *RB* would have gone on to become a powerhouse on its own, but taking over *CC* instantly placed G. B. firmly in the center of comicdom, and doubled his circulation. It also brought with it more frequent contributions from Ronn and Biljo.

However, Love's plan to publish two fanzines in one, with a separate section for *The Comicollector*, soon fell by the wayside. It was simply not practical, and didn't make a lot of sense. Inevitably, the features migrated toward the front, and the ads (roughly 75% of each issue) comprised the remainder.

To be sure, *RB-CC* continued to have its shortcomings. Aside from the typos and strikeovers, Gordon Love did not have the finesse of a Foss or White. The lay-outs were functional, and no more than that. But *RB-CC* was dependable, the ads were readable, and there was enough in the way of columns and letters to provide a modicum of entertainment. Most fans subscribed to *RB-CC*, and virtually every fanzine advertised in its pages.

With the Microfilm Lending Library of Comic Art operational in

June, Jerry Bails' next priority in 1964 was the Academy Directory, which turned out to be a great success. It was re-named *The Who's Who In Comic Fandom*, and eventually contained 1,600 addresses, as well as the first history of the rise of comicdom, lists of all known comics fanzines that had been published up until that time, and Academy information.

Bails, too, had an idea for a type of fannish communication new to comic fandom, and one that wouldn't be nearly as taxing as *The Comic Reader*: an "apa" (amateur press association, or alliance). Although "apas" had long been a part of sf fandom, it may have been Johnny Chambers in *FANtastic* #1 (January 1964) who lit the spark in comicdom when he included an open letter partly to Bails stating, "I propose a 'CAPA' or comics amateur press association. As for my choice for an apa president, I would choose Jerry G. Bails." The article goes on to describe how an "apa" operates by having a Central Mailer assemble pre-printed contributions sent in by roster members, and then mailing a complete set to each member in a regular monthly, or bi-monthly mailing. Even if Bails was familiar with how apas in sf fandom operated, he seems to have adapted Chambers' name suggestion (*Capa*) into the title. *Capa-alpha* #1 was established that summer, and the first mailing is dated October 1964. The contributors to the first issue were Bails, John McGeehan, Paul Gambaccini, Al Kuhfeld, Howard Keltner and Richard Kyle. Other founding, or charter members of *Capa-alpha* were Dan Alderson, David Castronuovo, Margaret Gemignani, Glenn Goggin, Pete Jackson, Bob Jennings, Dave Kaler, John Koch, Tom McGeehan, Dick Memorich, Marc Nadel, Pete Phillips, Bill Placzek and Duncan Robertson.

In this year of restless shifting of plans and publishing responsibilities, most of them fortuitous, one of the happiest turned out to be Roy Thomas' ascension to post of full editor and publisher of *Alter Ego*. Though Jerry had given Roy the title of co-editor in the first four issues, it was Bails who had called the shots. But two issues had been enough for

Editor Foss. Ronn was more than happy to hand it over to Thomas, who had been working as a high school English teacher in St. Louis since mid-1961.

Roy hurtled headlong into the task during the summer in an effort to beat the 1964 Alley Award deadline of October 31st. Biljo White took on the role of art editor, and the two of them made a superb team.

As a writer, Roy brought to his work the kind of literary approach that one found in *Xero* and *Comic Art*. For *AE* #7, he decided to complete a Marvel Family article he'd been planning since 1961. "One Man's Family," with many illustrations by White (including a beautiful cover, despite Captain Marvel's lightning bolt on his chest being reversed), expertly recounted the origins of the Marvel Family, discussed the Sivanas and other villains, and highlighted some of the more memorable adventures. Thomas' fine piece undoubtedly introduced a whole new generation of younger fans to the magic and mirth of the Fawcett Captain Marvel, Captain Marvel Jr. and the rest. Augmenting Thomas' article was a long letter from Otto Binder, writer of most of the Golden Age adventures of the Marvel Family.

Other top-notch features in this issue included a strip by Biljo ("Alter and Captain Ego"), a JSA article on Solomon Grundy by Richard Kyle, and a piece ghosted by Thomas on the Human Torch called "A Hot Idea." All helped make *AE* #7 one of the best fanzines of the 1960s.

"*Alter Ego* #7 was printed by Cashbook Printing in my home town of Jackson, Missouri, though I was teaching in the St. Louis environs at the time," Roy recalled. "I was both amused and annoyed when I heard ... that Mr. Beatty [the pressman at Cashbook] had grumbled, 'The best printing job I ever did, and it was for a goddam comic book!'"

In 1964, change was in the air. As if further evidence is needed, another fanzine made a format metamorphosis that proved to be highly popular. The Golden Gate group (Dubay, Arbunich, Franke and Bauman) had combined their two fanzines, *Fantasy Hero* and *Heroes' Hangout* into a "group zine"

called *Fantasy Heroes' Hangout*. Dubay and Franke teamed up for "The Invincibles" comic strip (their only artistic collaboration), and Arbunich wrote a long, long article on the Nedor Comics Group.

Laughing, Dubay recalled, "Marty researched the most horrible line of comics I have ever seen, and [Rudi and Barry] supplied him with the comics."

"I figured that, since Rudi and Barry had almost the entire line of Nedor Comics, if there was ever anyone who was going to write a definitive retrospective history, it was me," Arbunich explained. "The resulting 21-page article, profusely illustrated, was crammed with facts about the entire Nedor line—undoubtedly more information than just about anyone would ever want to know."

"Although I was proud of all our publications, I guess, I was especially proud of *Fantasy Heroes' Hangout*," Marty said. "The idea that we merged with these other guys to put this thing out ... seemed really exciting."

"The whole thing expanded our horizons," Dubay added. "When [Rudi and Barry] came into our lives, the whole East Bay opened up to us. And we became aware that

there was another side of the world—the rest of the United States!"

But, after only one ditto issue of *FHH*, they came up with the innovative idea of converting it into comicdom's first newspaper. The new *FHH* would be printed photo-offset in a newspaper format, with the latest news in comicdom, photographs, columns and other features. Naturally, any newspaper worth its salt had to have comic strips, and *FHH* would be no exception. During the summer, the partners began soliciting regular comic strips from the top names in fandom, with a September 1 deadline announced. And so, with the second issue, *Fantasy Heroes' Hangout* changed from a regular fanzine to an offset newspaper with 10" x 14" pages. Its name changed too. It would now be known as *Voice of Comicdom*.

VOC's attempt to present only the highest quality strips was generally successful, possibly because the shorter format allowed artists to lavish more time on the work. #2 (September 1964) introduced their initial strip line-up. "The Web" by Marty Arbunich and Bill Dubay, "The Sorceress" by Rudi Franke, "John Center" by

Roger Brand, "Solano the Brave" by Ronn Foss, "Vance Fleetwood" by Joel Beck, "The Eye" by Biljo White, "Dave Gypsy, Space Vagabond" by Mike Vosburg and four more—all of top quality—made a dazzling center spread.

It was fascinating to watch fandom's leading lights adapt to the differing demands of the daily strip format, and they acquitted themselves admirably. The double-daily format (or Sunday format) that began with #4 gave the reader a bigger part of the story, and soon some of the strips expanded to one full page per issue. *The Eye* by White was perhaps Biljo's slickest work ever, and two others were of the highest quality: *The Web* by Arbunich/Dubay that became a James Bond/Man From U.N.C.L.E. pastiche with some of Bill's most accomplished work, and *The Cloak* by Chesney, which was reminiscent of pulp characters of the 1930s like the Shadow. The story itself wasn't really that important, for it was impossible to follow the narrative flow with so much time between issues (*VOC* was published closer to quarterly than monthly)—but the art made up for it.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *VOC* was the sheer



Art by Dick Memorich



Who's Who In Comic Fandom and Capa-alpha #1, two successful projects launched by Jerry Bails in 1964.



VOICE OF COMICDOM

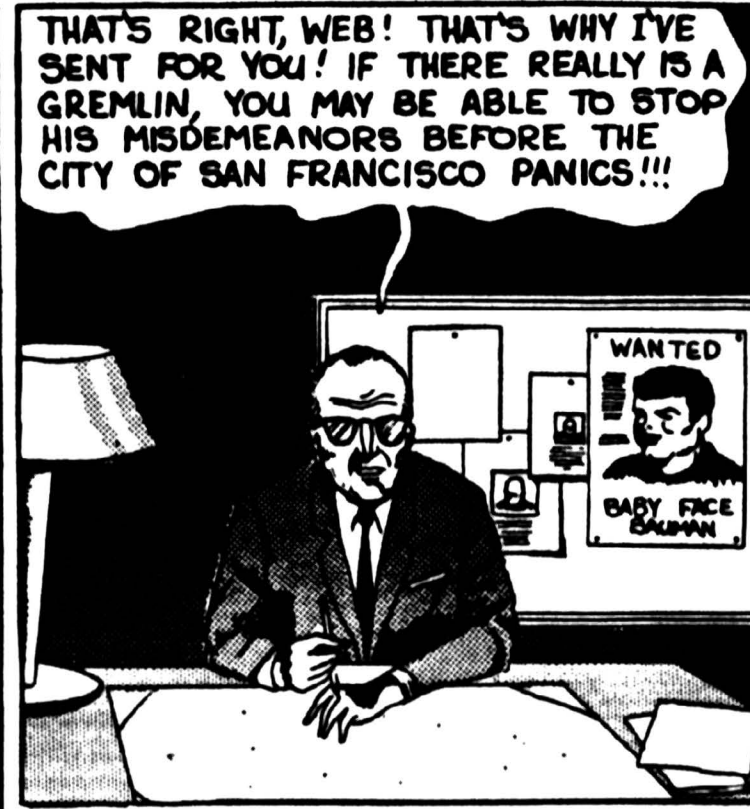
FANDOM'S FIRST NEWSPAPER **NUMBER TWO**

SEPTEMBER 1964. **

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

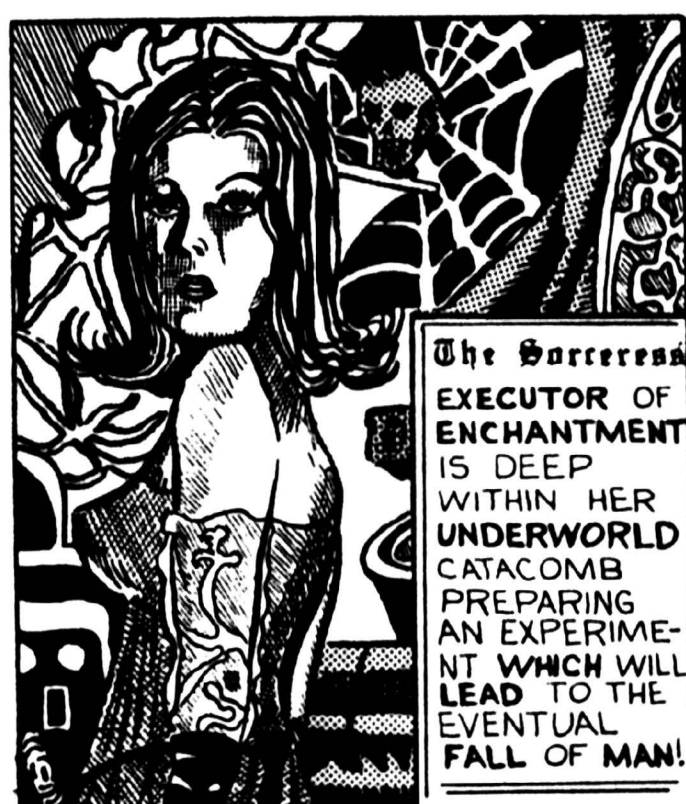
The WEB

by Arbutich and Dubay



The SORCERESS

by Rudi Franke



variety of its comic strips. Instead of delivering "long underwear" characters, we were treated to pulp hero adventures, science fictional universes, the western milieu, the world of the super spies, as well as the purely humorous strips by Chambers and Dubay. It was clear that fans wanted to create, and read, comics from the entire smorgasbord of possibilities.

Voice of Comicdom became mostly Bill Dubay's baby. He did the lay-outs and editorial work, and admitted that it wasn't really published often enough to make the continuing strip format work. "Still, it was an interesting idea, and people seemed to like it," Dubay

concluded. *VOC* started with a circulation of 1000 copies, and hovered around that figure for most of its run.

By the end of the year, the stewardship of the Academy had passed into different hands. Paul Gambaccini of Westport, Connecticut, was selected as Executive Secretary for the new year, and inaugurated a newsletter for the Executive Board called *Forum* to discuss Academy business. One of the key items on the agenda was to bring the full influence of comic fandom to bear to mount a top quality national convention.

For, along with everything else, one of the main things fans realized in 1964 was that a convention was not a simple proposition. There had already been a few attempts, with varying degrees of success.

Footnotes - Chapter 5

¹Jerry Bails, "Open Letter to Members of the Academy," ca. September, 1963.

²G. B. Love, letter to the readers, *The Comicollector and Reader* #15, March 1964.

³Jerry Bails, editorial, *The Comic Reader* #23, March 1964.

6

The First Comicons

Comic Fandom will not be a fandom in its own right until it holds its own convention.

Jerry Bails, 1962¹

It's hard in retrospect to understand why it seemed so difficult for fans, once they were identified and interacting, to come together in one place for a national comic convention in 1964. *Who's Who In Comic Fandom* had identified a multitude of comic fans, with more coming "out of the woodwork" all the time. If anyone needed a blueprint, all one had to do was see how the 1962 ChiCon (for example) was organized.

Maybe that was the key. Fandom still had only one personality who was a premiere leader and organizer, Jerry Bails, and his hands were full. Another factor: he didn't live in the vicinity of New York City.

Yet the desire to get together with other collectors and pros was strong, and getting stronger as 1963 and 1964 progressed, as evidenced by a growing number of fan meetings, conclaves and regional cons. The push was on. It was only a matter of time. And somehow it felt as if 1964 was the year a national convention just might happen.



Biljo White shows Ronn Foss a copy of Batman #1 in the White House of Comics, a concrete block building constructed to house White's collection.

In 1963, Ronn Foss had traveled the "comic circuit" when he decided to move from Suisun, California, to return to the Midwest where he'd grown up. He'd just met with Mickey Martin,

Bill Birtcil, Rudi Franke and Barry Bauman before leaving, then rode the Greyhound to Columbia, Missouri, to get together with Capt. Biljo. He spent one night in St. Louis, poring over Roy Thomas' complete set of *All-Star Comics*. Foss then headed northeast to Indianapolis to visit Ed Lahmann (and pick up the 1962 Alley results) where he was also scheduled to meet with Jerry. From there Ronn continued to his new base in Van Wert, Ohio.

Bails, too, made a "tour of fandom," beginning with a stop in Ft. Wayne, Indiana to lunch with Grass Green, then to Indianapolis to meet Ed and Ronn. From there, Jerry (and his family) drove to Columbia to meet with Biljo and Roy Thomas, who had arrived too late to see Ronn. (This was the first meeting of Jerry and Roy, the original editors of *Alter-Ego*.) Then Bails visited his old home town, Kansas City, Missouri, where he got together with Vernell Coriell, a prominent Burroughs fan.

Because of the "Missouri Connection" (Roy, Biljo and former

Missourian, Jerry), first Bails and then Parley Holman proposed Missouri as a site for a national convention, but it seems that neither Roy nor Biljo was available to lead the charge.

As early as May 1963, Chuck Moss and Bill Regier attempted to promote a Regional Con in Omaha on June 20th through the 22nd. Apparently their announcement in *The Comic Reader* #17 did not meet with sufficient support. The \$15 fee might have had something to do with it. It seemed doubtful that fans wanted to pay that kind of hard-earned cash unless there would be a number of comics professionals on hand.

It did seem that New York City was the best place for a con, with its proximity to the pros. There it would not be necessary to pay airfare or hotel bills for the pros in the area; they could simply take a taxi or subway. When George Pacinda, a major supplier of industry news to *TCR*, announced rather grandiose plans for an International Comicon to be held in New York City, fans were pleased if a little skeptical.

In November 1963, Pacinda's committee met to discuss plans for the con, to be held in conjunction with the 1964 New York World's Fair. In attendance were Pacinda, Bernie Bubnis, Len Wein, Ron Fradkin, Frank Brunner, Phil Liebfred and several others. They decided to poll fans about the best dates, possibly the July 4th weekend, and ask whether fans would be able to pay the projected \$15.00 fee (\$25 if they wanted to stay in the hotel). They also wanted fans to suggest ideas for the program. (Leonard Darvin of the Comics Code Authority was actively advising Pacinda on matters of hotels, etc.)

Soon it became clear that the committee was spinning its wheels, and nothing concrete was actually getting accomplished. On the surface, Pacinda remained optimistic, but a teenage fan named Bernie Bubnis finally stepped forward and took action. In Ronn Foss' new "wire service" fanzine, *Dateline: Comicon* #7 (February 1964), Bubnis wrote, "I know you'll probably make me play the part of heavy in the drama of putting on the Comicon, but I don't care what sort of

criticism I get thrown at me—I'm going to take a crack at it. We need all the help and publicity we can swing. We've got to let fandom know that an organized group of fans are definitely putting on a plan to get this Con going."² Would the young upstart be able to pull it off?

Meanwhile, Jerry Bails was making plans for a gathering of many of the most active fans in the Midwest.

By the 1963 poll, the Alley Awards had grown from the original eleven categories to twenty-eight categories, including those that recognized superior achievement in the world of fanzines. Ballots began to pour into Bails' mailbox, and by the March 15th deadline, he'd received some two hundred and fifty completed ballots (of the estimated one thousand that were distributed)—a large quantity to count on his own. He decided to invite anyone who would come to his home on the weekend of March 21st to help add up the votes. It was a perfect excuse to bring fans together. Maggie Thompson dubbed it the "Alley Tally," and Jerry went into action. The invitations were made for what would turn out to be the first sizable gathering of comic fans from a multiple-state area.

On March 20th, Foss (always an insomniac) stayed up all night preparing for the trip. In order to make pre-planned connections, he loaded up the trunk of his Lincoln around 2:00 a.m., and set out on the highway to Ft. Wayne, Indiana, to rendezvous with Grass Green. From there they were off to pick up the South Bend Crew, consisting of Jim (*Countdown*) Rossow, Bob (*Fan-To-Fan*) Butts and Keith (*Rapport*) Greene.

"I was amazed that my father agreed to let me go to Detroit with two people he had never met before," Rossow remembered. "But Ronn and Grass were extremely likable people, and in the few minutes they spent picking us up made a good impression. Years later, my dad would ask if I'd ever heard from Grass again."

Meanwhile, Chicago fans Don Glut and Dick Andersen were motoring up to Michigan with Alex Almaraz. Alex was a collector who

was one of the rare fans of this era who didn't want to write or draw comics or fanzines; instead, he was more interested in enjoying the social side of fandom, and was responsible for many in-person visits. Almaraz, who likened his appearance to that of the Hulk, was quite a character: gregarious, proud of his Italian heritage, and always the joker.

Don Glut was a double or triple-fan: a casual comics fan, a rabid serial nut, and very involved with Forrest J. Ackerman and monster fandom. Rather than the sedate life of some comics fans, Glut had been in a street gang at an early age, mostly as an outlet for a lot of energy and drive. Something of a hustler, he got his hands on a home movie camera while still in his early teens, and began producing his own amateur movies starring Captain America and others. Don published a fanzine called *Shazam!* which crossed over several fandoms. Dick Andersen was his co-editor. They took up Almaraz' offer of a ride to the Tally.

Laughing, Don remembered, "We didn't know that the heater in Alex's car didn't work. And also there was a hole in the bottom of the floorboards somewhere, and we kept getting this cold air. We also didn't know that he had planned on taking a side trip to visit a girlfriend he had up in Wisconsin or somewhere, so Dick and I spent the night shivering in his car while he was in there with his girlfriend!"

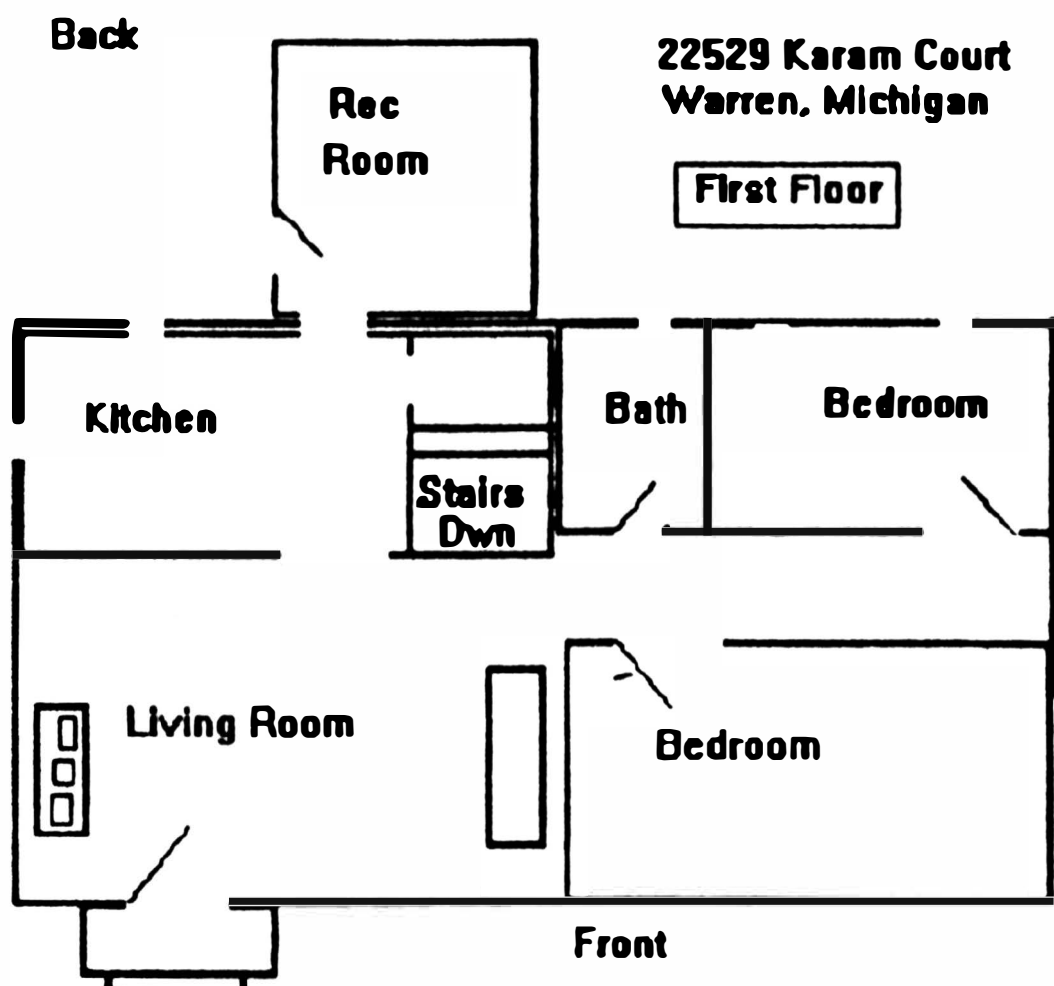
The Bails family (Jerry, Sondra and his two small children) lived at 22529 Karam Court, in the suburb of Detroit known as Warren. "It was a rectangular brick ranch house like every other on the block," Jerry recalled. "One feared driving up the wrong driveway, entering the house and kissing the wrong wife. There were no porches, just chain link fences."

Downstairs it had a completely finished Recreation Room that stretched the entire length of the house. The Rec Room, probably about 15' x 25', would handily accommodate the group. Jerry's collection was in a small side-room (dubbed the Reading Room) on metal shelving and boxes. With typically thorough preparation,

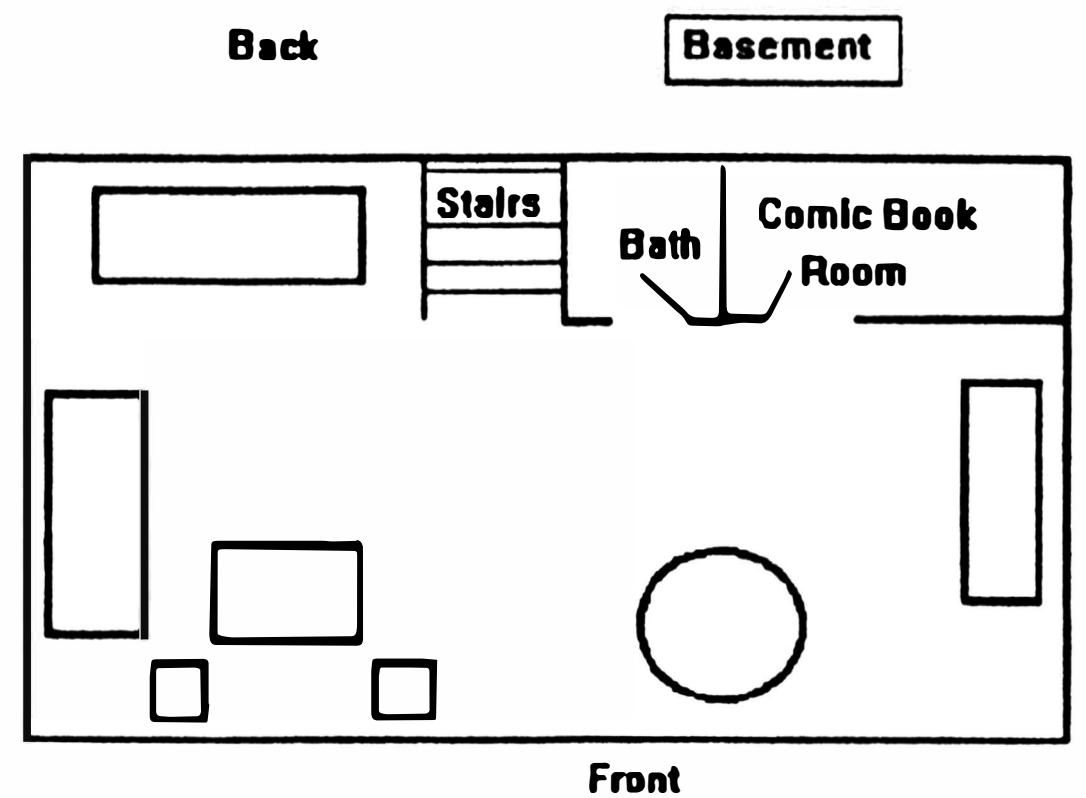


PHOTO BY RUTH WHITE

Biljo White, Jerry Bails, Sondra Bails, Linda Rahm and Roy Thomas gathered together at Biljo's place in Columbia, Missouri, for a 1963 "summit" meeting.



Jerry's House



The Alley Tally Party, held at Jerry Bails' home in March 1964, brought together fans from several surrounding states, including (standing) Chuck Moss, Don Glut, Jim Rossow, Lamp Post, Bob Butts, Dick Andersen and Mike Tuohey. Front: Jerry Bails and Alex Almaraz. (Floorplan of Jerry's House by Tuohey.)

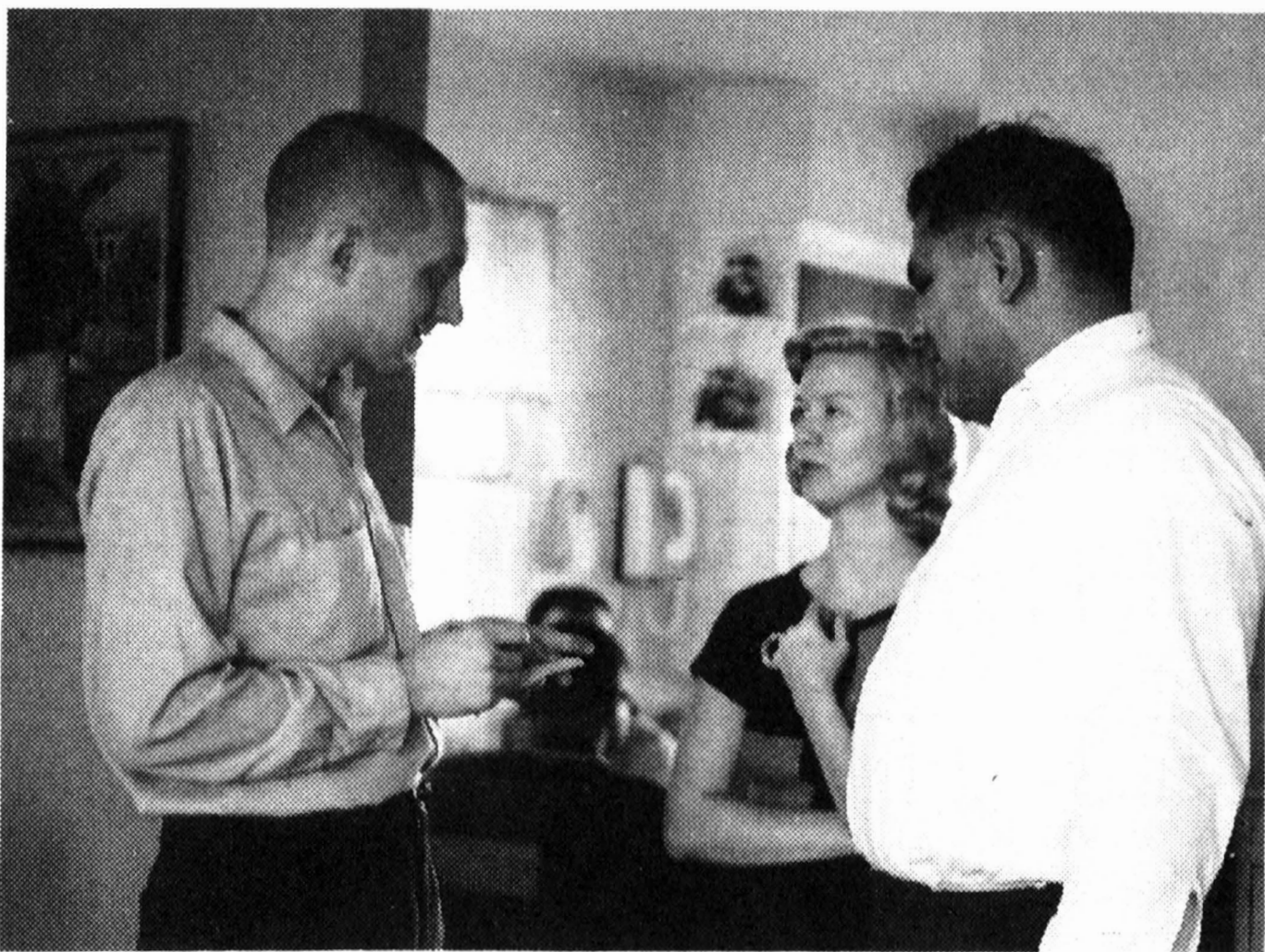
The Alley Tally Party



Edwin Aprill Jr., Alex Almaraz, Fred Jackson and Mike Vosburg at the Bails kitchen table.



The Alley Award trophies displayed at the Tally Party, with the 8" redwood carving (dark) up front. (Unfortunately, a blurry photograph.)



Jerry and Sondra Bails, with Alex.



Glut, Butts, Raybourne, Andersen, Almaraz, Bails, Rossow, Greene, with Foss and Tuohey below.

which was his hallmark, Jerry had spent a considerable amount of time getting things ready. A chalkboard stood center-stage, ready for the tallying activity that lay ahead. Extra folding chairs and card tables were at hand. Many pages of original comic book artwork, mostly samples from the titles edited by Julius Schwartz, had been mounted on the walls. Underneath was a banner proclaiming, "The Second Heroic Age of Comics."

Local fan Mike (*Super-Hero*) Tuohey had visited Jerry many times since May of 1961, when he'd received his copy of *Alter-Ego* #1. Though only twelve years old, Mike was treated cordially by Jerry, and was soon recruited to help Bails lick stamps and stuff envelopes, as well as collate the early issues of *A-E*. Upon entry to Jerry's living room, each visitor was handed a sheet headlined:

WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM OF COSTUMED HEROES

Bails had devised a flyer to quickly and clearly address various issues of protocol, including smoking,

handling of rare comics, the \$3 fee for food and drink for the weekend, as well as sleeping arrangements.

Other fans had also traveled the highways of the Midwest in search of fannish spirit. Don and Maggie Thompson made the four hour drive from Cleveland that morning. The Alley Tally was the occasion which marked the first meeting of Bails and the Thompsons. From far-flung Nebraska came Chuck Moss. He was the only one visiting from outside the nearby states, perhaps partly motivated to attend in the hope of obtaining contributions for a new fanzine that he was planning.

"After seeing Detroit the hard way (like lost), we disregarded the oft unreliable advice of service station guides, and phoned Jerry to get our bearings," Ronn wrote at the time. When the gang in Grass' green Pontiac spied the distinctive lantern-style lamp-post, with the familiar numbers "22529," it was shortly after 2:00 p.m. Already on the premises were the Thompsons, Chuck Moss, Don Glut, Dick Andersen, Alex Almaraz, Gerry Sorek, Ed Aprill and Mike Tuohey. They gathered in the front yard to greet the new contingent. Everyone got a laugh when Bails

hoisted Foss onto his back as if to carry him piggy-back up to the house.

Edwin M. Aprill Jr., at 36 years old, was one of the elder statesmen of comicdom. He was undoubtedly one of the earlier arrivals; he had traveled from nearby Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he worked as a school teacher. Ed was especially interested in newspaper strips, and became known in fandom for publishing collections of Buck Rogers strips, among others. [See Chapter 11]

The attendee who seems to have the distinction of "briefest appearance" and "first to leave" was college student Gerry Sorek. "I was there all right, but, unfortunately, only for a brief time.... At that time, not all the Big Names were there, so I didn't meet everyone, but I do think I recall counting ballots at Jerry's kitchen table. None of the people were actually friends of mine. Those I knew at all I knew only through Jerry."

One of the last arrivals was Mike Vosburg of Pontiac, Michigan. The day before, Voz had despaired that he might not make it because he had come down with a bug. Fortunately, the ailment was only a 24-hour flu, and Mike felt sufficiently recovered to attend. Fred Jackson, another Pontiac fan who had helped with the first issue of *Masquerader*, would be going along too.

Recently, Mike said, "These were people that I was writing to, and in a sense when you write someone, it's a cerebral thing. Basically you're sending them words, they're sending you words. Suddenly all these people were coming together. You know the expression in the 1960s, 'blowing your mind'? This was a first!"

"In those days, fans were almost like celebrities," Don Glut said. "A name like Bob Butts, a name you saw in the fanzines and DC letter columns ... he was a kind of celebrity. I hadn't met any of those people before, other than Alex and Dick."

Larry Raybourne and Russ Keeler from Cleveland rounded out the group of nineteen. Though new to comicdom, Larry had been a collector of Batman and the Marvel Group for many years. He

was one of three writers on the *Hi Brow* Greeting Cards put out by American Card Company. He was an astrologer, make-up artist and comic character costume fan, who was also much talked about because he kept a python as a pet. More than one fan commented on Raybourne's facial resemblance to Prince Namor. Quiet, bespectacled Russ Keeler was a close friend of Larry's—almost his shadow. By most accounts, his interest in comics was minimal, seemingly extending only to supporting Raybourne's involvement in the hobby.

For an aspiring artist like Mike Vosburg, "Perhaps one of the most interesting events at the Tally was the great supply of original art which appeared on display."³ For fans of mass-produced comics, a chance to examine original art provided a magical glimpse behind the scenes into what it took to actually create them. A number of pages, and complete stories, had found their way into the hands of those who had letters published in the Schwartz-edited letter columns. At that time, the artwork became the property of the publisher, and Schwartz thought nothing of sending a complete story to reward a fan for a well-written letter. Soon, the pages began to circulate through fandom for sale or trade.

In 1964, Vosburg wrote, "Though I brought several Kubert pages myself, it was but a fraction in comparison to the collections that Jerry had and what Ronn brought along. Ed Aprill even appeared with an Al Williamson page that took away everyone's breath. Ronn and I marveled over the detail in Caniff's *Steve Canyon*, another original Ed had brought along. To me, his greatest treasure was an 'On Stage' strip by Len Starr, who is an inspiration to me. I suspect that the only things that weren't shown here were EC and Simon & Kirby originals."³

Maggie Thompson remembered, "Don and I had seen Bill Thailing's collection. But Jerry's was so carefully organized, in bags hanging from the ceiling, and I remember thinking, 'Can we adapt this for our own purposes?' Because there was no really good way to store and display the

things. We were still living in apartments, so the idea of somebody living in a house who had it set up, had a system for comics, was very impressive."

Before long, they were divided into groups to tally the votes of the 1963 Alley Awards. Splitting up into groups of three or four, they dug into the pile of Award ballots. All through the day, till midnight, the din of vote-counting hummed through 22529 Karam Court.

Foss recalled, "Don Thompson, maybe Maggie also, were standing at a chalkboard and striking off hash-marks, you know, 1 2 3 4 and diagonal to make 5. And groups of people sitting around counting up the awards would shout out specifics, and Don would record them. And that went on the first day for the Pro awards."

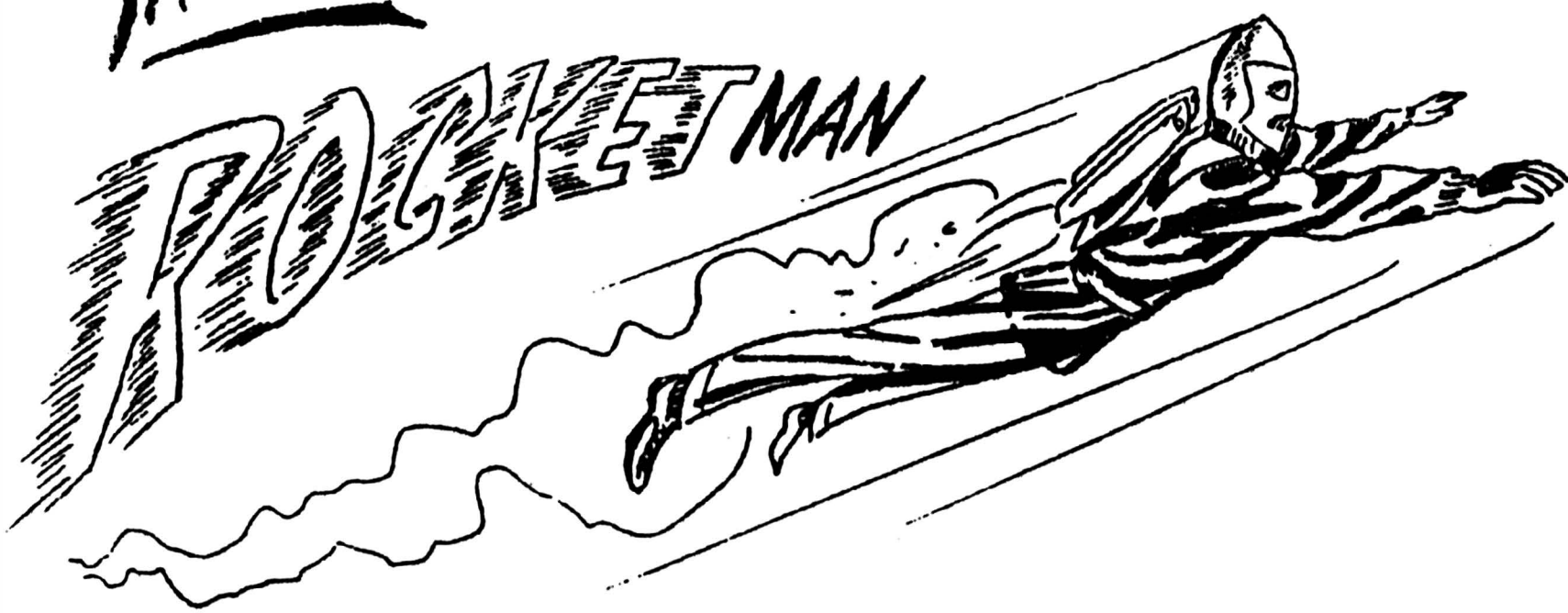
Working with Don Thompson reading the votes of the various nominations for team-ups in *Brave and Bold*, Mike Tuohey said, "There were some weird combos suggested."

Someone remarked, "Here's a discriminating vote: Wonder Woman and Super Monkey together as a cross-over team!"—followed by a roar of laughter.

Don Thompson confirmed, "Mike Tuohey and I had drawn the category of team-ups people wanted to see, a nightmare category because it was all write-ins. And as it got later and later, and we got more and more tired, we were cracking up over suggested team-ups, like Krypto and the Joker. At one point, Mike went over in a corner and stood on his head when everything was crazy."

Stan Lee won "Best Writer" and "Best Editor," and *Amazing Spider-Man* was voted "Best Comic Book," with *Fantastic Four* right behind. Even Jerry Bails marked Stan Lee over Julius Schwartz in the "Best Editor of a Comics Group" category. Perhaps this was due to his dissatisfaction with the handling of the *JLA*, which he wrote in to Category 24, "Strip Most Needing Improvement." In fact, Marvel won ten of the fifteen pro categories. In his original account, Foss notes, "When I slumped into a rocker at 11:00 p.m.—having gone forty-seven hours without [sleep]—the Pro Division had just

Thrill TO THE ASTOUNDING ADVENTURES OF ...



illo by Foss



Ronn Foss as Rocketman at the Alley Award Tally Party in 1964

been completed, leaving the Ama to do."⁴

Most of the talliers were back on the job by 8:30 a.m. Sunday morning, again faced with the purple names and numbers. By 1:00 p.m., the final tally had been recorded, and everyone seemed to give a collective sigh of relief.

Just about everyone had brought along something to show others. Voz offered up, to the admiration of all, his nearly completed paste-ups for *Masquerader* #6, the first and last offset issue of that fanzine. Even Jerry Bails, who was not easily impressed by amateur work, wrote, "Everyone was breathless at the sight of the magnificent Batman illoes by Dick Memorich. Nothing like this has ever appeared in fanzines before. Believe me when I say you are in for some real treats."⁵

"The other thing I remember about it," Vosburg remembers, "was the generation gap. Mike Tuohey, myself, Jim Rossow, we were all like fifteen and sixteen. I remember talking to Grass and Ronn for a while, and joking around ... but basically the older guys had their own things ... that I couldn't have related to at the time."

One of the things that seems to have bridged the gap, and rightly so, was the magic of EC. A number of fans, including Alex Almaraz, were big fans of the erstwhile line of comics, and brought examples to

show off. Chuck Moss brought his collection of *EC Mads*. For some of the younger fans, this may have been their first exposure to the true wonders of classic Williamson, Wood and Frazetta artwork. The evident quality of EC instantly appealed to most fans of comic art. To see them was to love them.

Suddenly, who should appear, "jets smoking and helmet gleaming," but Rocketman ... straight out of the 1940s movie serials, *King of the Rocketmen* and *Zombies of the Stratosphere*. Clad in an authentic-looking helmet, wearing a leather jacket, jets strapped to his back, the familiar breast-plate with controls, and a futuristic gun tucked in his belt, the dynamic figure appeared out of nowhere, startling the remaining fans who were milling around Jerry's back porch. The fans gasped as the dynamic figure leapt onto a picnic table. Soon, he was seemingly flying into the air before their very eyes!

Who was the Man of Mystery behind that gleaming silver helmet?

None other than Ronn Foss.

"I used balsa wood and cardboard to make the helmet, with model airplane glue, and painted it silver," Foss explained years later. "The rocket tubes were maybe two and a half or three inches in diameter, two of 'em on the back, and a little hinged breastplate with a straight

pin bent hook to snag it from one side of the jacket to the other. The pistol was fashioned out of clay in a matter of minutes, painted silver like the helmet. It was pretty good-looking stuck in my belt.

"I had the outfit in the trunk of the car. Nobody but Grass knew about it. I didn't want to come in on the height of excitement the first day. I waited until the second day, when things were kind of winding down a little bit." Though it was an overcast and chilly Sunday, "we all gathered together ... at the back of the house. I went out to Grass' car, put the costume on. Just slipped on the leather jacket, which had the tubes attached to the back. Put on the helmet.

"I'm fairly certain that I did in fact light some Jetex pellets to make smoke pour out of the jet tubes. I know I had experimented a lot with them.

"I do recall standing on Jerry's picnic table in the rear and leaping up into the air, arms spread, trying to simulate a Rocketman pose, and a lot of pictures being taken."

"For just that split second, as he jumped into the air, arms outstretched in perfect super hero fashion, you thought he just might be going some place!" Chuck remembered. "I was impressed."

According to Don Glut, "He surprised everyone. It was a pretty spectacular appearance. The costume was great."

The last item on the informal agenda of the Alley Tally Party was a roundtable discussion on what could be done to improve comic fandom, and plan future fan get-togethers. Thanks to Chuck Moss, a tape recording of this discussion has survived. Though sometimes difficult to follow, often chaotic, it nevertheless is the source for this account.

First item on the agenda was the future of fan meetings, including whether comic fans would enjoy and should support sf cons. "I really had fun at the ChiCon," Don Glut commented. "But maybe it was because it was the first one I ever attended."

Support for Bernie Bubnis' upcoming New York Comicon was only lukewarm, since there were numerous questions. These were days when plane travel was less common than today, and most fans were relatively young and/or of limited means. Driving to New York seemed a daunting prospect, especially when it was learned that the program was to be only a one-day affair.

Much of the talk about future comicons, possibly a regional meet, centered around whether or not pros would attend. Jerry pointed out that guests-of-honor invited to speak at other types of conventions routinely had their expenses paid, plus some sort of an appearance fee. Would comic fans be willing or able to provide that level of support? And what other items would be on the program? A lot of questions were raised, but few had answers or proposals.

Another major topic was the rising prices that dealers were charging for Golden Age comics, with Howard Rogofsky (who always had the highest prices) singled out for special castigation. There was loose talk about boycotting those prices. Ed Aprill, a dealer himself, spoke up several times in favor of letting the marketplace decide the value of comics. But Jerry commented that other collectibles had price guides, and it seems clear that even in 1964, the need for such a guide for comics was becoming apparent. Someone pointed out that \$10.00 should be the maximum price for any old comic. Aprill quickly disagreed, asking "What about

comics from the 1930s? They're worth much more than \$10.00." The need for a clearly defined grading system was also broached.

Attention turned to the Alley Award statuettes made by Ronn Foss. He passed around the original 8" redwood carving he had done in 1962. A perennial problem had been the breakability of the plaster duplicates. Ronn rapped one on the table. It broke, to groans all around. "Another one I'll have to glue," was Foss' rueful comment.

Finally, around 4:00 p.m., it became clear that the party was over. Some faced lengthy drives. Amid exclamations of satisfaction over the way the weekend had gone, the crowd shouted in unison (for the benefit of the tape) "*First Tally Party!*"

Some wag added, "*—and the last!*"

Speaking close to the mike, Chuck Moss intoned, "For the closing of this thing, I'd just like to say ... The End."

"Not the end," a voice contradicted. "*The beginning.*"

The last words on the audio tape were those of a fan muttering (à la John Paul Jones), "We haven't yet begun to fight."

While no great claims were made, the Tally Party had been an unqualified success, and in some very important ways, bore many of the earmarks of later comicons: trading and selling comics, an art show, a masquerade, a banquet (if one counts ordering out for pizza!), celebrity artists, overnight accommodations and fans from outside the immediate vicinity. Was the Alley Tally Party the first comicon?

Like determining what was the first comic fanzine, or the date



Mike Vosburg's cover to a 1992 fanzine commemorating the Alley Tally Party.

that comic fandom was founded, such a determination is at best arbitrary. If the Tally Party were openly advertised to fandom in general, perhaps it could be considered the first regional comicon. That honor, more accurately, goes to a subsequent meet held in Detroit just two months later.

First, Don Glut held a two-day affair in Chicago on May 9th and 10th, where the star attraction was a showing of the complete Republic serial "Adventures of Captain Marvel." In attendance were several of the Tally Party folks, as well as a large group of local fans. One problem occurred when some of the older fans were drinking beer and getting a little rowdy. Later, Alex Almaraz took it upon himself to take care that such an episode never occurred at the Chicago club meetings again, for he felt it was a breach of trust to the parents of the younger fans in attendance.

The Comic Reader reported, "On Sunday, May 24 [1964], two teenage fans carried off the first successful convention of Detroit-area fantasy-film-comic fans.

The credit goes to Dave Szurek (age 17) and Bob Brosch (age 15) for initiating, planning and executing this affair, which was held at the Hotel Tuller in downtown Detroit. Over a dozen dealers were selling their wares over the tables that were specially set up for the occasion. According to the report, some seventy fans and collectors made the scene. The highlight was a showing of the famous 1936 film *Things To Come*. Short talks were given by Sheldon Dorf ("Edgar Rice Burroughs"), Jerry Bails ("Comicdom—Past, Present and Future"), Gary Crowds ("The Vampire—a Classic Film"), and Bob Brosch ("The Great Fantasy Films"). Among the many door prizes were original art from Tarzan, Dr. Solar, and Brothers of Spear, donated through the courtesy of Gold Key Editor, Bill Harris."⁶

Shel Dorf, a local commercial artist and collector of vintage newspaper strips, recently remembered, "While Dennis Kawicki was showing the film, with about five interruptions for reel changes, the wind kept blowing back the blackout curtains over the windows, and there would be a shaft of light across the screen.

"It was more of a little swap-meet. Bob's sister made a big bowl of punch, and there were a lot of card tables with cartons of books. But that was the first one." Immediately thereafter, the idea of a larger convention the following year was discussed.

Then, just four days later, a group of West Coast fans got the "fan-meet bug" and gathered at Russ Manning's home in Los Angeles. Here, unlike the Detroit con, a pro was actually in attendance, but the

group was very small—just five prominent fans in addition to Manning who was quite active in early comicdom: Richard Kyle, John McGeehan, Bill Spicer, Rick Durell and Glen Johnson. This get-together was followed by similar meetings in June in Carrollton, Texas (at the home of Larry Herndon) and in Oklahoma the following month.

But the eyes of comicdom were trained toward the Big Apple and Bernie Bubnis' New York Comicon (also known as the Tri-State Comicon). Would the pros support it? Would it draw from just the local area, or from around the country? Would it top the attendance at the Detroit affair? In short, would it be the comicon that fandom had been waiting for?

Beforehand, Bubnis had done his best to reduce expectations. He acknowledged that it would not be anything like the grandiose convention that Pacinda had promised. He and his cohort, Ron Fradkin, decided to limit the con to one afternoon. It would be held on July 27th, a Monday. This was selected because it was thought that they would have a better

chance of gaining pro attendance from DC and Marvel, especially editors like Julie Schwartz and Stan Lee. It was held in the Workman's Circle Building on 4th Avenue, near Union Square.

In his *TCR* report, Paul Vizcarrondo wrote that he and two friends "decided to take the subway, and who should we meet but Bernie Bubnis and Ron Fradkin.... Bernie and Ron were loaded down with artwork and other door prizes besides their own personal artwork and comics and thus had

their hands full trying not to drop anything. We got to the meeting place at 2:00 p.m. Many fans were already there and, after saying hello to those we knew and introducing ourselves to many we didn't, we all found seats and Bernie called the con to order."⁷

After some opening words by Bernie, he introduced Dave Twedt (sounds like "tweet"), a college student who was working at Marvel for the summer and would act as Stan Lee's proxy. Twedt asked for questions from the fans, and soon was fielding them from all sides.

In the midst of the Marvel question-and-answer, Larry Ivie entered the room. "As I entered, I heard my name being softly voiced from various parts of the room, but ... was disappointed to find that the persons I had planned to meet there did not arrive because they could not find the place." Apparently, the room was difficult to locate in the building. Not enough fans were stationed at various points outside, and no one had thought to put up signs to point the way. "Quite a few said they searched until they were forced to give up and go home," he wrote."⁸



Reproduction of the metal button designed by Art Tripp for the first New York Comicon, coordinated by Bernie Bubnis.



Larry Ivie and Don Glut as the Red Skull and Captain America, as they were dressed for the costume competition at the 1964 WorldCon.



Above: On May 28, 1964, a group of prominent West Coast fans gathered at the house of Russ Manning. Standing: Glen Johnson, Richard Kyle, Rick Durell. Kneeling: John McGeehan, Bill Spicer, and Manning.



"Altron Boy" by Larry Ivie was serialized in Ivie's Monsters and Heroes magazine in the mid-1960s. He was a popular fan artist, and could achieve impressive effects in both ink and oils. His entries into the art contests at WorldCons (like the one in San Francisco in 1964) often won prizes. But as the 1960s progressed, Larry Ivie seemed to drift away from involvement in comic fandom.



At the 1964 WorldCon: Barry Bauman, Bob Metz, Larry Ivie and Bill Dubay with a masked Bob Hall (of Green Hornet fame).

Twedt handled the questions with considerable alacrity, and from all reports the fans (while disappointed that Stan Lee hadn't come) were satisfied that they'd gotten most of the answers they wanted. (Flo Steinberg, Lee's secretary, also attended.) One question Twedt hadn't answered was how much the writers and artists got paid. He referred the question to Steve Ditko, who had quietly entered during Twedt's session and was sitting in the audience. Ditko declined to answer with a shake of the head.

Bubnis was forced to call a break for refreshments (because the ice was melting into a huge puddle beneath the two cases of soda pop Phil Seuling had donated), though fans continued questioning the Marvel representative in a smaller group. Despite the fact that the room was almost unbearably hot, many ignored the root beer and plunged excitedly into the cartons of rare comics in Don Foote's stacks at the front of the hall, or Phil Seuling's at the back. Howard Rogofsky, Claude Held, Marc Nadel and Bill Thailing were there, but armed only with their price lists.

Rogofsky remembered, "Malcolm Willits had a single lot of comic books for sale for \$1000. No one even had \$100 for comics back then, so he had to sell it parcel by parcel. I was seventeen years old then, so I didn't have that much money either."⁹ Others reported that Willits had copies of *Action #1*, *Captain America #1* and *Superman #1*, among many others. Nearly all the attendees hailed from New York or New Jersey, though Ohio (Bill Thailing), Maryland (Rick Weingroff, Al Russell) and California (Tom Wilson, Mal Willits) had representatives. Others present were Paul Gambaccini, Dave Kaler, Margaret Gemignani and Dave Bibby.

Bibby noted, "One thing I noticed about Steve Ditko. When he talks, he uses his hands and fingers just like Spider-Man."

In about an hour, Bubnis called the group to order for a presentation by Gold Key Lone Ranger artist Tom Gill, who set up two easels and entertained the group for forty-five minutes. Then it was time to distribute the door prizes. Just about everyone in the group of fifty fans received

something, usually a piece of original art. (Although no one from DC attended, editor Murray Boltinoff did contribute art for door prizes, and Julie Schwartz also supplied some pages.) Art Tripp gave everyone a metal button two inches in diameter (red and blue lettering on a white field) emblazoned with the words, "*Comicon 1964*." The remainder of the time was spent with more swapping, gabbing and trading.

Ivie wrote, "I met Howard Rogofsky for the first time, and found him ... a very clean-cut, intelligent-looking and likable individual—despite the absurdity of his price lists."⁸ Unfortunately, it seems that by the time Dick Lupoff was able to arrive after work, the older fans were gone, leaving him with the impression that the con consisted of "essentially a roomful of bewildered-looking twelve-year-olds." He didn't stay long. Fans drifted out, and at 6:15 p.m., Bubnis declared the con closed.

Thirty years later, Bernie Bubnis commented, "I had no conception of how to organize a comicon. I was just too young. I probably had more respect for sf



Billy Placzek in the attic room of his home in Chicago, in the midst of his eye-popping collection of rare comic books, a gift from a family friend. Right: with another Chicago fan, Ed Navarrete.

than comics, at the time. Of course, I had no idea that the 1964 comicon would mean anything, historically. I just did it because I thought *someone* should."

In the 36-page souvenir booklet that was published after the event, Bubnis was self-effacing, and ran Rick Weingroff's rather pointed critique of the con. This and other post mortems pointed to various shortcomings (lack of publicity, hard-to-find location, the weekday date, lack of pros, the stuffy room) but, in the final analysis, all gave due credit to Bubnis. If not for his efforts, the con would not have happened at all. Despite the fact that the prior Detroit mini-con may have outdrawn and outlasted the New York event, the 1964 New York Comicon has traditionally been considered the first real comicon, perhaps because of the presence of three representatives from Marvel, and the number of well-known fans and dealers in attendance.

To finish up the year in style, the Chicago fans threw another fan party, this time over Christmas vacation (December 26 and 27). The ostensible reasons for the get-together were to see *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (the Republic serial) and the amazing collection of 27,000 Golden Age comics that young Billy Placzek has been given by a friend of his father. (Several newspaper articles were written about Placzek.)

Out-of-towners were Jerry and Sondra Bails, Don and Maggie Thompson, Roy Thomas, Coreen Casey, Ed Aprill, Bob Butts, Keith Greene, Dave Kaler and Larry Raybourne. Local fans included Ed Navarrete, Ross Kight, Don Glut, Doug Moench, Al and Mart Kracalik and several others, including the ever-bullient Alex Almaraz, who made pizzas for the throng. (The head-count was nearly thirty fans.) This was the first time Roy Thomas met the Thompsons and Don Glut.

Even the fact that the serial was a "no-show" didn't dampen spirits too much, for the real highlight was the trip to Billy Placzek's house. "Upon arriving at Billy's, everyone was escorted upstairs in the attic where he had all his comics stored," Almaraz wrote in *The Comic Reader*. "Don and Maggie seemed to be very fascinated by the vast collection. His room was small and crowded and some of us had to take turns going in and out to view his comics."¹⁰ Fans expressed dismay at the haphazard way the comics were stacked and handled; others voiced skepticism at the 27,000 figure. But no one failed to be impressed by the collection, which boasted copies of *Detective* #27, *Superman* #1, et al. It was nearly midnight before the spellbound fans left Placzek's house, some making their way to a hotel for the evening. The get-together continued the next day, with viewings of other films, but the Big Red Cheese never did show up.

As Larry Ivie and others have pointed out, the comic book contingents to be found at the World Science Fiction conventions held in the US offered a lot to the fan of comic art. The 1960 PittCon and 1962 ChiCon had each written their share of important pages in the history of comic fandom. The

same would be true for the WorldCon that was held in San Francisco over Labor Day weekend in 1964.

Comic fans in attendance were the Golden Gate foursome (Franke, Dubay, Arbunich, Bauman), Steve Perrin, Margaret Gemignani, Jeremy Barry, Don Glut, Cat Yronwode (then Manfredi), Larry Ivie, Clint Bigglestone and at least a dozen more well-known fans, as well as pros like Edmond Hamilton who wrote both science fiction and comics. Glut and Ivie played Captain America and the Red Skull in the masquerade, and Ivie won a prize in the art show. Steve Perrin concluded his report in *The Comic Reader*, by stating, "Until comic fandom can support its own conventions, I suggest that comic fans make use of the facilities provided by the scifi fans to get together and build for the future of their own fandom."¹¹

Fans wouldn't have to long to wait. In November, Dave Kaler was appointed chairman of the con-committee for the first Academy Con. It would be held in New York City the following summer. Even then, the Detroit fans, now led by Shel Dorf, would steal some of their thunder.

Footnotes - Chapter 6

¹Jerry Bails, *The Comic Reader* #13, November 8, 1962.

²Bernie Bubnis, "Open Letter from Bernie Bubnis," *Dateline: Comicdom* #7, February 1964.

³Mike Vosburg, "The Masquerader Speaks," *Masquerader* #6, June 1964.

⁴Ronn Foss, "The 1963 Alley Tally - A Report by Ronn Foss," May 1964.

⁵Jerry Bails, *TCR Special Report*, April 1964.

⁶Jerry Bails, "Detroit Got There First, To Prove It Can Be Done!", *The Comic Reader* #26, June 1964.

⁷Paul Vizcarrando, "Report on the First Annual New York Comicon," *The Comic Reader* #28, August 1964.

⁸Larry Ivie, "Comicon '64, A Report by Larry Ivie," *Comic Art* #5, October 1964.

⁹Gary Carter, "Interview with Howard Rogofsky," *Comic Book Marketplace* #18, October 1992.

¹⁰Alex Almaraz, "A Report on the Captain Marvel Showing in Chicago on December 26th and 27th," *The Comic Reader* #33, January 1965.

¹¹Steve Perrin, "Con Within A Con," *The Comic Reader* #30, October 1964.

The word "SHAZAM!" is written in a large, bold, stylized font. Each letter is outlined in black and filled with a white, textured pattern. The exclamation mark is also stylized, with a long, curved tail.

7

1965: A Watershed Year

Events had crowded thick and fast in the early years of comic fandom's Golden Age, as fans seemed to be trying to make up for lost time. In retrospect, it's possible to identify 1965 as the year when it all came together—a turning point that divided the early tentative period from a period of increasing confidence. By this watershed year, it became clear that the movement had gained a momentum all its own, and one that would propel it forward even without the nurturing guidance of its founders. All the different streams that flowed together were now a rushing river.

Stan Lee at Marvel went out of his way to court comicdom and the older comic book reader. His secretary, Flo Steinberg, dutifully sent out thank you notes for every fanzine received, saying how much "Stan and the gang" enjoyed the latest issue. In the comics themselves, they dropped the "Dear Editor" heading for letters, and became "Stan and Jack" or

"Stan and Steve" to their fans (as of *Fantastic Four* #10, January 1963). Stan also facilitated contacts between fans by printing full addresses in their "Fantastic 4 Fan Page," which for some time was Marvel's only letter column.

Lee gave several boosts to fanzines in the FF Fan Page. *FF* #10 printed a letter from G. B. Love that asked fans to contact him to find out about his fan club and fanzine (though *The Rocket's Blast* wasn't mentioned by name). Stan plugged Ronn Foss' *Comicollector* in the Special Announcements Section in *FF* #15 (June 1963); in *FF* #18 (September 1963) he gave the address of a Fantastic Four Fan Club being promulgated by Fred Bronson, fan-ed of *Bullseye*.

Scanning through those early *Fantastic Four* letter columns, one discovers many letters from members of comicdom: *FF* #3 (the first with letters) featured communications from Alan Weiss, Rick Norwood, George Paul and Bill Sarill; #5 had Roy Thomas' and Ronn Foss' first letters; #9

had missives from Buddy Saunders, Mike Tuohey and Paul Gambaccini; #12 printed offerings from Landon Chesney and Fred Bronson; #15 featured an extra-long letter from Roy Thomas; #17 had musings from Paul Gambaccini and Ronn Foss. #19 through 22 included letters from Steve Gerber, Mark Gruenwald, John Wright, Paul Moslander, Donald Markstein, Dave Cockrum, Wayne Howard, Lee Whittlesey and the ubiquitous Roy Thomas.

Soon, letter columns popped up in every Marvel title. This, coupled with the listing of complete creative credits, and the focus of the comics themselves on imperfect heroes, incited fierce loyalty among the teenage and college readers. By 1965, the Alley Awards clearly showed that Marvel had superseded DC in the hearts and minds of comicdom. The favorite comic was *Amazing Spider-Man*, and Lee took top honors as Best Editor and Best Writer.

But other comics had captured fans' attention that year too, as a

Address YOUR
letters to:
LEE and KIRBY
FANTASTIC FOUR
THIRD FLOOR
655 MADISON AVE.
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

FANTASTIC 4 FAN PAGE 4

Hi, fans and friends! Look—enough of that “Dear Editor” jazz from now on! Jack Kirby and Stan Lee (that’s us!) read every letter personally, and we like to feel that we know you and that you know us! So we changed the salutations in the following letters to show you how much friendlier they sound our way!

DEAR STAN AND JACK:

I have a comic fan club organized and we publish a fanzine each month in which we discuss new comics that come out, and old ones, etc. Would you ask any interested readers to contact me?

G. B. Love
9875 S.W. 212th Street
Miami 57, Florida

Dear Stan and Jack,

We are some of the many groups of fans who have a Fantastic Four Fan Club. Each of our members has an F.F. shirt which we made ourselves, and every member of the club is waiting for the FF Annual. We also think that you should keep your pin-up pages because they’re perfect for decorating our clubhouse. We just had a poll on the comics and heroes in the F.F. and here’s the result: Favorite Cover: “The Return of Dr. Doom”; Favorite Story: “The Mad Thinker and His Awesome Android”; Best Villain: Dr. Doom; Best Pin-up: Picture of the Fantastic Four; Best Member: Human Torch. I suppose that after this there’ll be more F.F. polls so we’re glad we started it.

Fantastic Four Fan Club
c/o Mark Gruenwald, secretary
605 North Sawyer
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

We hear that some of the Fantastic Four fan clubs are getting so exclusive that even the F.F. have trouble getting in! We want to thank all you fan club members all over the world for your terrific letters and enthusiasm. We genuinely appreciate it.

“unseen” characters of all time. I hope you do not under any circumstances at any time yield to the temptation to show any of them — let them remain nefariously in the background to annoy the Thing for reasons left obscure. Please? “The Impossible Man” was a great yarn, too, reminding me a little (but not enough to spoil it for me by any means) of the science-fiction novel, *Martians Go Home*, of a few years ago. I hope he does return to earth sometime, this time not to be driven away by ignoring so that the Four must think up a new stunt. Or could they? Personally, I’d like an issue in which he decides to annoy earth’s crimefighters, including the Four, Ant-Man, Thor, Spiderman (Perhaps), and maybe even the Hulk and Namor for good measure. As to your letter column, I would love to see the Four on T.V., but I realize that has about as large a chance as the proverbial snowball. Handled well, I think adults would really dig it, besides just us comic-book-loving souls. The Thing, in particular, has a real appeal, especially now that he’s abandoned his boots.

Roy Thomas
307 Greensferry Rd.
Jackson, Mo.

Thanks for the comments, Roy. Glad we don’t pay for these letters by the word.

painting, and drama, the *Fantastic Four* magazine will be held up as the best example of this. Thanks for many hours of entertainment.

Landon Chesney

Landon, old pal, if you ever run for president, let us know!

usually I’m not talking about FF! I hope these epistles don’t bore you, but I feel compelled to talk whenever I read an FF . . . and once I’ve started talking, nobody stops me. So you finally converted me!

Paul Gambaccini
8 Elizabeth Drive
Westport, Connecticut

on the moon. Both of these were disappointing. Also, the cover was horrible, cluttered up with all sorts of vital announcements. (Ha!) One more thing: I’ve never seen a worse artist combination than Kirby and Ditko. Both are great alone, but please, let’s not team them up again.

Steve Gerber
7014 Roberts Court
University City 30, Mo.

Steve would be a great letter writer if he wasn’t so shy about giving opinions!

will continue to do so. The battles between the Hulk and Iron Man were nothing short of fabulous. Finally — X-MEN! Overall, the mag was another great first. I really went for the story, and the artwork was good except for the inking, and that was only fair. On the individual X-Men, I flipped over the Angel. Keep up the good work. You make comic-reading a pleasure and an adventure.

Dave Cockrum
116 Abbott Hall
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Ill.

We’re also trying to make it a habit, Davey boy! Just wait till you see what we’ve got up our sleeves in the months ahead!



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS SECTION:

- Many, many of you fabulous fans have written offering to pay various amounts of money for back issues. Also, some of you have written offering to SELL back issues. Unfortunately, we simply don’t have the room to print these items, BUT — we have learned of a fan mag called the COMICCOLLECTOR, published by Ronn Foss, at 233 Benton Ct., Suisun, California. Ronn prints items about comics for sale or trade, and so we suggest that those of you who wish to buy, sell, or trade mags contact the COMICCOLLECTOR.

(Excerpts from several early FF Fan Page columns.)



Stan was answering an invitation to share a drink that Roy had sent him by mail the preceding week. Lee wasn't interested in socializing, but asked if Roy (whom Stan knew from *Alter Ego* and his letters to Marvel) wanted to try his hand at a writing test that Lee had devised. The test consisted of adding dialogue and captions to the artwork for pages 19 through 22 of "The Final Victory of Doctor Doom!" in *Fantastic Four Annual #2*. Could Roy adapt to the "Marvel method" of adding captions and dialogue *after* the penciling was done, when nearly a hundred others had tried it unsuccessfully? Thomas took the test overnight,

turned the pages in to Sol Brodsky (Marvel's production manager) the next day, and on the following morning received a phone call at DC from Flo Steinberg informing him that Stan wanted to see him.

Roy (who had not yet met Stan) rushed over to Marvel on his lunch break and was ushered into Lee's office. Strangely, nothing was said about how Thomas had fared on the writing test. "My memory of that meeting is crystal clear," Roy said recently. "Ten to fifteen minutes after we met, Stan—looking out a window—casually asked me, 'So, what do we have to do to hire you away from National?' " Within the hour, Thomas had handed in his notice at DC, and when Weisinger angrily refused his offer to stay until a replacement could be found (calling him "a spy for Stan Lee"), Roy returned to Marvel and soon was looking over a *Modeling with Millie* issue he was to write.

"I even moved in with Dave Kaler in East Greenwich Village," Thomas concluded his tale in the pages of *Capa-alpha*, "where we live pretending to be starving writers and wearing our Dr. Strange t-shirts in the coffee-houses."² Kaler's two-room studio apartment was located on Avenue A near 2nd Street, on the ground floor. It was nicknamed "Kaler's Kave." (Eventually, both Denny O'Neil and Gary Friedrich would join them in that apartment, albeit briefly, both fellow Missourians having come to NYC at Roy's behest.)

In one respect, making the adjustment to pro-dom offered a unique difficulty for Roy. His friends in comicdom naturally asked him questions about developments at Marvel, but Stan Lee specifically requested that he not reveal future plots or other Marvel news to the fanzines. Thomas' active participation in the fanzines came to an end (though he continued to attend gatherings in New York peopled by fans as well as pros).

Kaler, a 29-year-old market researcher, would be a key figure in the advancement of the comicon in 1965. "When I came to New York City from Florida, I got sick and I was so weak that I couldn't read anything," he recollected. "So, people brought me comic books.

And they looked so different from what I remembered as a kid. I was lucky enough to find the *Showcase* issues with the beginnings of the new Flash in used book stores in the city, and I noticed in some of the comics letters from Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas. So I wrote to them, and became involved in comic fandom." Kaler somehow heard about Bernie Bubnis' first attempt at a con, and dropped in on that event in 1964. Then he volunteered to attempt a full-fledged convention in New York City in the summer of 1965 (this time with the support of the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors)—but not before the Detroit fans put on a highly successful second convention.

The good showing at their regional mini-con in 1964 inspired Detroit-area fans to pull out all the stops the following year. They wisely conceived the idea of bringing together fans and collectors of fantasy literature, films and comic art for the first Detroit Triple Fan Fair, knowing that such a cross-fandom approach would draw the largest possible crowd.

The Detroit con committee of twelve was led by chairman Shel Dorf (who named the con and designed the logo for it) and co-chairman Carl Lundgren; also on board were Jerry Bails and Ed

Aprill. Another committee member, Gary Crowds, was an aspiring filmmaker. Crowds was a central member of the Midwest Film Society and had sponsored many movie showings in the recreation room in his home. He helped Dennis Kawicki handle the movie-division of the con.³

The Detroit Triple Fan Fair was held at the Embassy Hotel on July 24th and 25th. Thanks to an advertising blitz of hundreds silk-screen posters distributed to colleges, bookstores and fan clubs, numerous fliers and ads franked through fanzines, and several articles in the local press, it was a well-attended affair. Over a dozen dealers brought thousands of comics, old movie magazines, stills and other collectibles. The program featured the showing of the original *Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and other serials, as well as prominent speakers. The only thing missing was comics professionals, but everyone agreed it was a great success, and spawned a series of annual Detroit comicons.

The 1965 New York Comicon, just a few days later, could easily have been overshadowed by the Detroit affair, but it also proved to be a hit with the many dealers and fans on hand. Kaler had earlier worried that comicdom had seemed relatively apathetic toward his appeals for input, and

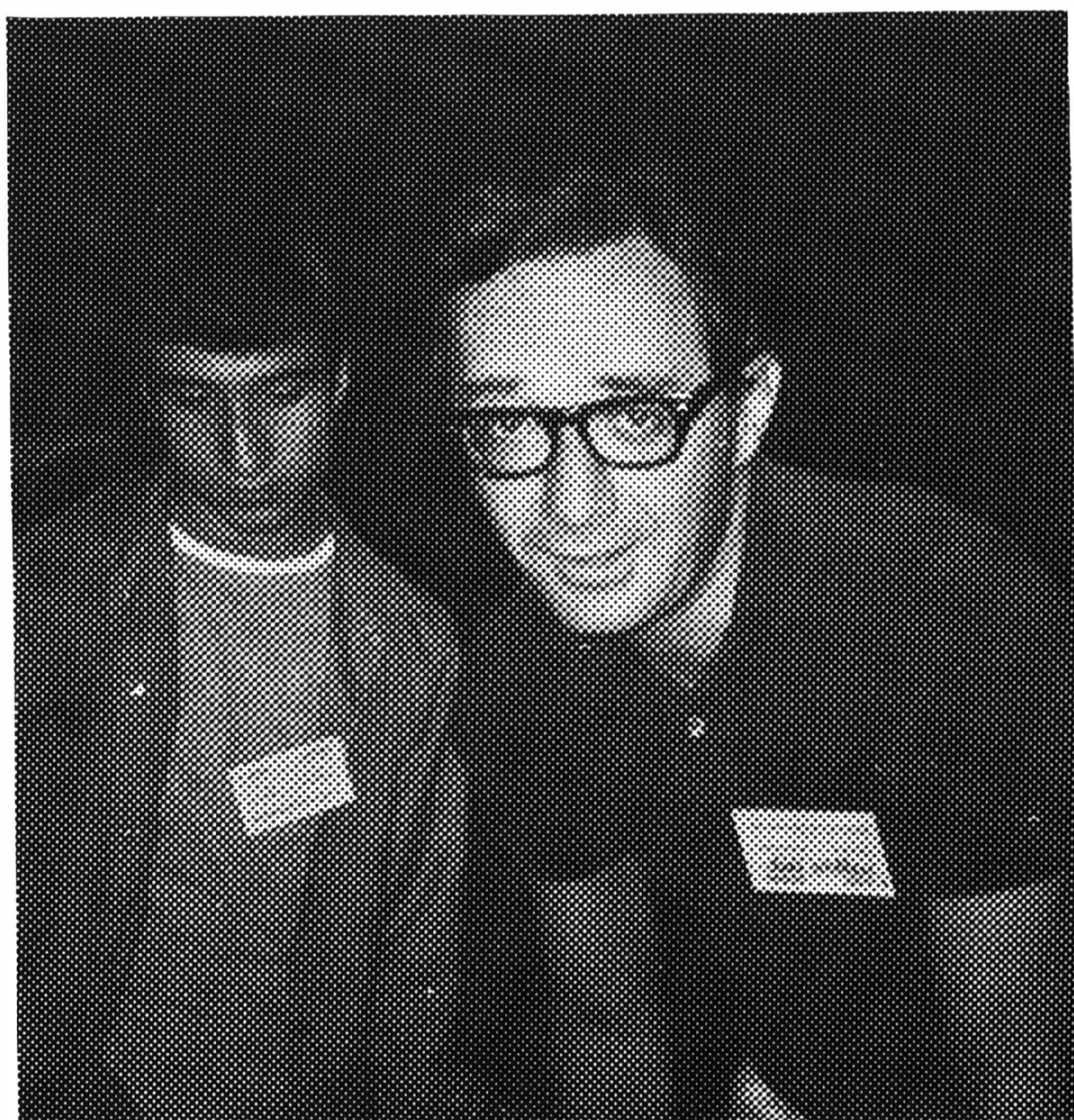


The Hotel Broadway Central [from newspaper photo]



David Kaler and Fabulous Flo Steinberg (Stan Lee's secretary) prepare to cut the "comicon cake" at the 1965 New York Comicon. Due to a record heat-wave, and a lack of air-conditioning in the Hotel Broadway Central, Kaler had stripped to his t-shirt.

Below: Jim Warren, publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland, Creepy, Eerie and Blazing Combat.



ended up organizing the thing with the help of a small group of local fans, including Marv Wolfman and Len Wein.

"I got people like Jim Steranko [who had not yet turned pro], and a whole group of people that I knew from DC and Marvel, who cooperated with me wonderfully," Dave recalled in a recent conversation. "We used to have local fan meetings at Marv Wolfman's house, and that crowd helped me put on the three conventions that I did."

On July 31st, fans converged on the Greenwich Village site of the Hotel Broadway Central (also known as the University Hotel), where a single room with a private bath cost \$6, and a double was \$8. Admission to the con was \$5 for both days. The hotel had been there since before the Civil War, and had definitely seen better days. In fact, it had been a center of controversy in recent years. It had gone from a gathering place of the famous and wealthy in the late 1800s to what the New York Times described later as "a cesspool of squalor and crime."

According to attendee Michael Uslan, there were winos in the lobby, the hotel had no air-conditioning, and the plastered walls were a network of cracks. "It was terrible," Uslan recalled, "but it was also affordable. We were so excited to be there, it didn't faze us."

Comicon II pulled in close to two hundred fans, according to Tom Fagan's report, which described the attendees as a curious mix of "well-dressed teenagers, [and] a few bearded and long-haired, others in T-shirts (Marvel shirts to be noted amongst them)."⁴ Fans were required to trade items they brought to the con for a claim check, for Kaler was concerned (and probably rightly so) about the pros being distracted or even insulted by fans who were trading and selling comics during the program. (A separate room for "panels" was apparently not yet feasible.) Jerry Bails acted as moderator of the first panel, featuring Gardner Fox and Otto Binder. It seems quite appropriate that they should be the first two big name pros to speak at a fan-sponsored event, given their participation in the earliest days of comicdom.

Fox and Binder discussed what it was like to write for comics in the 1940s. Before long, they were joined by Bill Finger (who, it was revealed to the surprise of many, had been instrumental in the creation of Batman) and Mort Weisinger.

Roy Thomas recalled, "Mort had just come in and sat like a malevolent toad in the back of the room, till he was called forward." Weisinger launched into a polite, if rather arrogant, defense of DC as the company that outsold Marvel "seven to one." When asked how to break into the comics field, Weisinger said "to go by way of the fanzines." He said that editors "watch these zines. They are quick to note the work of a good writer or artist or even a darn good critic."⁴ Thomas, who had incurred Weisinger's enmity, admitted to feeling a little uncomfortable at this point, though Mort made no specific reference to him.

After a lunch break, the stifling dealer room (for the con occurred on two of the hottest days of the year in New York City) was a scene of bedlam, as a free-for-all dealer's period took place. Prominent dealers on



Panel from Fly-Man #32 (July 1965), "Eterno The Tyrant," which was being prepared about the time Dave Kaler was looking for pro guests (like Jerry Siegal) for the program at the 1965 comicon.
Copyright 1965 Radio Comics, Inc.

hand were Phil Seuling, Doug Berman, Bill Thailing, Ed Aprill, Don Foote and others. "In the midst of it all," Fagan wrote, "CBS-TV camera crews threaded their way through the throng, interviewing here and there and barking orders to fans to 'get out of the way of the camera Sonny,' or 'Hey, Bud, watch out for that cord.'" ⁴ Bails was asked to re-enact a moment in the auction for the cameras, showing comics going for "big bucks."

Then came the dinner break, and it was time for the first official comicon masquerade. Fagan continued, "Even the dingy atmosphere of Hotel Broadway Central failed to diminish the color and excitement of the merry masque. Dual identities emerged for an evening time and the ballroom took on the flamboyant

appearance of a meeting of the Justice Society, X-Men and Justice League combined." ⁴ Kaler showed up as Dr. Strange, Thomas appeared as Plastic Man, and Phil Seuling was a goateed Captain Marvel. Margaret Gemignani, visiting from Rochester, New York, was costumed as Miss America. Also in attendance were the Fat Fury (Marv Wolfman), two Weather Wizards, Spider-Man, the original Atom, Batman and many more. Original comic book art provided by DC was given as prize-winners in the contest.

Michael Uslan recalls, "I can remember as vividly as if it had been yesterday... Phil Seuling striking a heroic pose as Captain Marvel, amid all these other kids

in costumes, and saying dramatically, 'It's a bad night for evil doers!'"

The evening was concluded with a showing of chapters from the Captain America and Captain Marvel serials, which would become a staple of comicons for years to come.

Day Two began with a showing of "Flash Gordon Conquers The Universe" (minus a few middle chapters to save time). During a break for refreshments, Flo Steinberg cut the official Comicon '65 cake. After an interval for more frantic dealing, and a dinner break, the con would conclude

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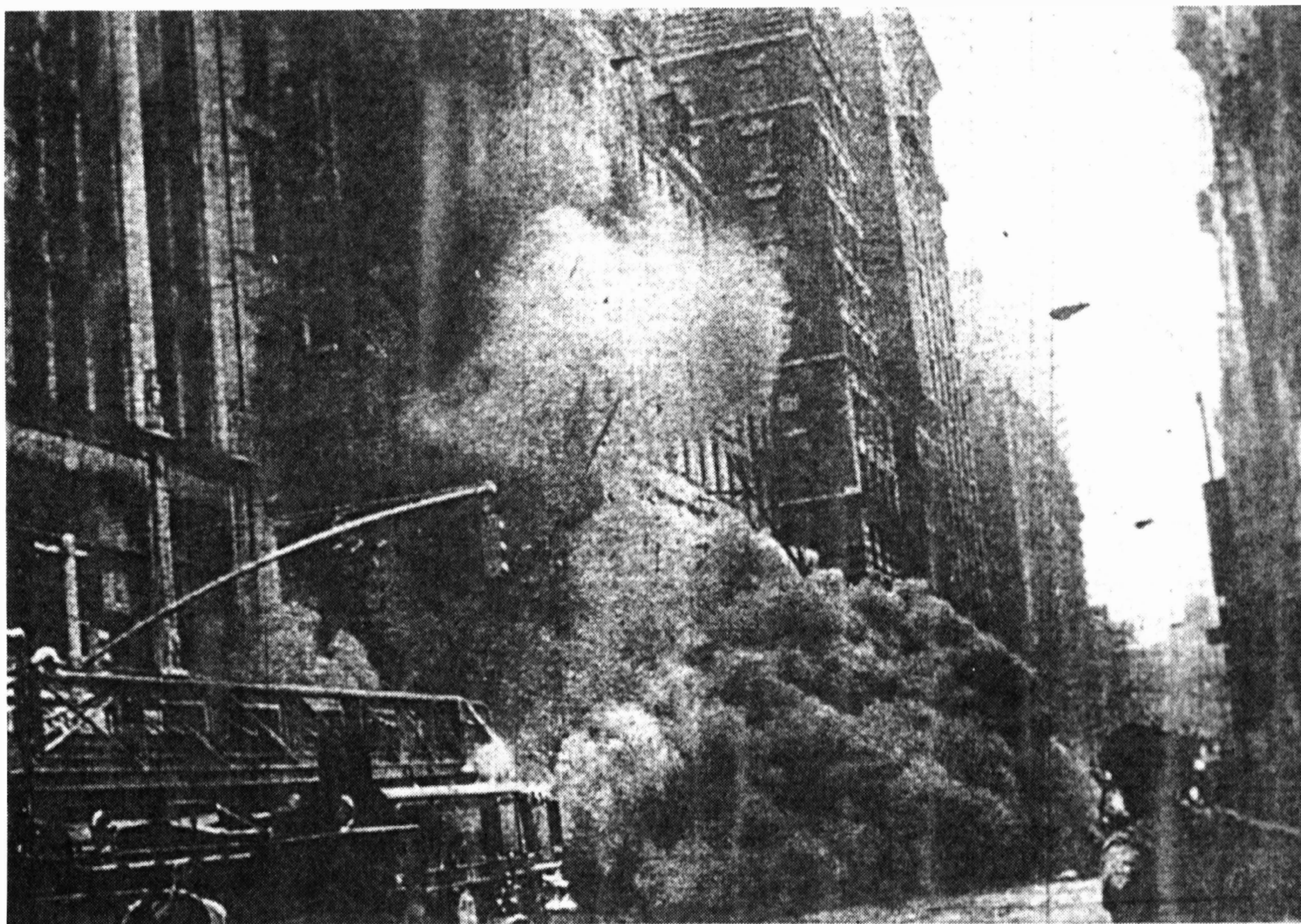
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New York, N.Y. 10017, Saturday, August 4, 1973*

WEATHER: Sunny and warm

VILLAGE HOTEL FALLS; 17 HURT

Search for Bodies Amid Rubble



119-Yr.-Old Structure Tumbles. With a thundering roar and huge
University Hotel at Broadway.
Minutes before, another section had fallen. The 119-year-old hotel was one of the city's oldest.

Left: The collapse of the Hotel Broadway Central, several years after the 1965 New York Comicon was held there, made front page headlines. If this disaster had occurred during that comic book convention, fandom might have lost many of the most active participants.

with a final panel discussion and the awarding of the 1964 Alley Awards.

This last program entitled "Comics and Fandom: Where Do We Go From Here?" was perhaps the highlight of the official program, for it tackled issues close to fans' hearts. And the fans and pros on the panel sparked fireworks with their candor and occasionally opposing views. Kaler moderated the panel, which consisted of Roy Thomas and Rick Weingroff (for the fan point of view) and Jim Warren, Murphy Anderson and Bill Harris (representing the professionals' viewpoint). In the audience and vocal were also Gil Kane, Leonard Darvin (of the Comics Code Authority) and others. After Gil had made several impromptu interjections from the floor, he was invited to sit on the panel.

According to Fagan, "Warren maintained fandom exerted little influence on the publishers. 'Publishers listen just to be polite, Warren frankly stated, 'the Great God is sales. Return statements are the only influence on publishers. Fandom is like the UN. It may accomplish a lot of little things, but in a knockdown drag-out war, it's no help at all. Fandom—at best—makes work more pleasant. At worst—it develops to the point where fans get the idea they know more about the publishing industry than the editors.'"⁴ Roy Thomas maintained that fandom had contributed a great deal, particularly in terms of the hero revivals such as the Spectre, the Sub-Mariner, and the Atom.

This attempt at mutual understanding between pros and fans showed the great divide between them. But, as Mark Evanier recently said in the pages of *Capa-alpha*, in response to this type of attitude from pros at later conventions, he wished he had stood up and said: "Why *should* we know—or even *care*—what will sell? Isn't that *your* job? Can't we express our enthusiasm for certain comics, certain forms without being treated like employees who are failing to come up with

lucrative marketing ideas?"⁵ But this was 1965, and fans were not in a confrontational mode.

Kaler diplomatically brought the panel, and the second New York Comicon, to a close. He had managed to pull off the best con yet, especially in terms of attracting pros.

One strange-but-true fact is that the rundown Hotel Broadway Central collapsed to the ground on August 4th, 1973, apparently because of poor construction and the continual vibrations over the years from a nearby subway tunnel. The photo caption on page 1 of the New York Daily News breathlessly reads, "With a thundering roar and huge cloud of dust and debris, [a] section of [the] University Hotel at Broadway and Bond St. collapses." Fortunately, nearly all of the 308 persons registered at the hotel were able to evacuate in time.

In 1965, the hobby of comic collecting garnered unprecedented attention outside its small circle of practitioners. One of the earliest media articles appeared in the *New York Times* in December 1964, headlined, "Old Comic Books Soar In Value." It featured quotes from Louis Cohen, owner of Jay Bee Magazine Stores in New York City, such as "customers for the old comics include 'kooks,' nostalgic men in their 20's and 30's, pop artists studying the techniques of early cartoonists and colleges and universities studying the 'social attitudes' of the times that are reflected in them."⁶ Cohen cited the most popular comics in the store as back issues of *Superman*, *Captain Marvel Adventures*, and *Batman*, stating that many of those published during World War II were worth as much as \$7.50. This was the article that set off a brush fire of copycat pieces in newspapers and periodicals across the country, and caused *Newsweek* to take notice.

Shortly after it appeared, Jerry Bails was contacted by a *New York Times* reporter for a follow-up story, which included Jerry's name and the fact that he was a professor at Wayne State

University. This second article was reprinted in scores of newspapers across the country.⁷

"*Newsweek* saw the original article," Bails wrote at the time, "and sent out a fleet of its own reporters across the country to gather cute quotes for a feature of their own on comic collectors. The word was out that some kooky professor in Detroit was an avid collector."⁸

Bails contacted a handful of Detroit fans, including Shel Dorf, who recalled, "Jerry invited us all over to his house [on January 16, 1965] to be interviewed by Hugh McCann of *Newsweek* in a sort of round robin. What we told him went into a pool along with material from other reporters who were talking to people in other cities. After the reporter left, we sat around and made the first plans for the Detroit Triple Fan Fair."

Fortunately, an audio tape of that meeting was made and has survived, courtesy of Shel Dorf. McCann, a rather soft-spoken individual, conducted the interview informally. It began with Dorf telling McCann, "It's our pleasure to have you here. We are a group of people who have not had the right kind of publicity in the past. We're looked upon as a type of oddballs. However, we are quite serious. We are great appreciators of the creative works of various artists and writers."⁹

When asked to characterize the type of person who collects comic art, Eugene Seger (a 34-year-old collector of Buck Rogers comic strips and books) had an interesting response. "It's difficult to define the appeal of these things. The person who likes these things is probably, in general, through other phases of their life, attracted to other things that are unusual. It may be that they are a little advanced mentally, or intellectually, in the things that they like, and are therefore ... bored with things that ordinary people are satisfied with. They are the adventuresome type, or the pioneer type, even if they can't do it physically, they can at least do it in their minds."⁹

Jerry Bails commented, "One thing that is different about us is that we all can enjoy ourselves with our hobby in isolation. We may have had a few contacts, but [extensive] social contact is ... a recent development for most of us. We've enjoyed our own solitude, and there are many people who can't enjoy their own solitude. We can do that.

"In my professional world, the amount of literature that I read is considerable. But I enjoy something that's a total break with that mundane world that doesn't place quite the same kind of demands on me. They say that men in our society frequently make a total break from their childhood. I see no reason, if you enjoy something as a youngster, why you should ever lose that enjoyment."⁹

When the talk turned to the subject of the Academy and fanzines, Bails was asked how much mail he received on an average day. "I'm not publishing anything now, but when I was, I would get between twenty-five and fifty pieces a day." McCann seemed to have a difficult time understanding the concept of an amateur magazine. "A fanzine really serves as a vehicle to bring you into contact with people," Bails patiently explained.⁹

From that interview in Bails' living room, only Jerry and Shel were mentioned by name, and quoted in the actual piece. The famous (or infamous) *Newsweek* article, entitled "Superfans and Batmaniacs," appeared on February 15, 1965.¹⁰ In large part, the article was relatively accurate, but the



Howard Rogofsky

Seeger described the extent of his Buck Rogers collection at the time, and Dorf recounted in a fair amount of detail the process whereby the Dick Tracy comic strip was accepted by a newspaper syndicate, and why he felt Tracy had strong appeal. Shel also pointed out that Milton Caniff's work had been shown in museums, and was accepted by some as fine art.

Bails explained the term "the Golden Age of Comics," talked about the JSA, and other titles in his collection of an estimated 5,000 books. The prices commanded by old comics were discussed, with Bails stating that *New York World's Fair Comics* would sell for around \$75.00. (But he was quick to point out that most comics from the Golden Age could be had for a few dollars each.)

Also present, and having their turn at the microphone, were Marvin Giles (ERB and pulp collector), Bob Brosch (collector of sf and horror stills), Gary Crowdus (aspiring filmmaker), Carl Lundgren (a younger collector), and Dennis Kawicki (collector of movie soundtracks).

authors adopted a rather snide tone at times, referring to fans as "the comic cultists." It also included thinly-veiled allusions to some of the "cultists" being homosexual. Certainly, Dorf must have been disappointed that comic *strips* were given short shrift (considering how much they were emphasized in the McCann interview). The emphasis was mainly on comic *books*, primarily *Superman*, *Batman* and *Captain Marvel Adventures*. (Phil Seuling was also interviewed by a *Newsweek* reporter for this article, but he wasn't mentioned by name.)

After receiving national exposure, Bails wrote that "not a day has passed since that I haven't been bugged by a reporter wanting to get in on the bandwagon."⁸ Other fans were also finding smug reporters on the other end of their phone lines. Suddenly comic fans, who had always craved recognition for their hobby, were discovering that attention was not always a good thing—especially when the articles were condescending, silly, or suggested there was

HOWARD ROGOFKY, P.O. BOX L-1102, LINDEN HILL STATION, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11354

The comics listed are complete and in good condition unless otherwise stated. A prompt refund on all items previously sold but alternate choices are appreciated. REFUNDS WILL only be given if there is a defect in the book and RETURNED IMMEDIATELY. ALL ORDERS UNDER \$18.00 MUST ADD 50% FOR POSTAGE. All orders are insured. Please send a self addressed, stamped envelope with all orders for acknowledgement. Send 15¢ if you want to receive my complete list.
o=coverless @=each SAK=Simon & Kirby #1-10 means 1 thru 10

DC PUBLICATIONS

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ACTION #36-50 5.00¢
ACTION #53-79 3.00¢
ACTION #82-101,103-107 2.50¢
ACTION #120-199 1.50¢
ADVENTURE #75-77,80,83 8.50¢
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ADVENTURE #89,94(both-pages out) 3.00¢
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BATMAN #80-99 (#50 is o) 2.25¢
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DC PUBLICATIONS

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DETECTIVE #104-175 2.25¢
BIG ALL AMERICAN 128 pages (Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman, Atom) 30.00¢
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COMIC CAVALCADE #6(pgs out, 10-12,16,18,21,25,26,29) 4.00¢
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FLASH #16-20 6.50¢
FLASH #21-40 5.00¢
FLASH #41-83,99,101,102,103 4.00¢
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Excerpt from Rogofsky's comics list
(from RB-CC #50, 1967)

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VAULT OF HORROR #8 #14,15,16 (1950) 8.00¢
VAULT OF HORROR #17,18,21-25 5.00¢
VAULT OF HORROR #26-40 4.25¢
WEIRD SCIENCE #12(1950 #1)15.00¢
WEIRD SCIENCE #13,14,15('50) 8.00¢
WEIRD SCIENCE #5-10 6.00¢
WEIRD SCIENCE #11-22 4.00¢
WEIRD FANTASY #13(1950 #1)15.00¢
WEIRD FANTASY #14,15,16('50) 8.00¢
WEIRD FANTASY #17,6-10 6.00¢
WEIRD FANTASY #11-22 4.00¢
WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY #25-29 3.50¢
INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION #31-33 3.00¢
MOON GIRL #1-8 4.00¢
WVR AGAINST CRIME #1-4,6,7,11 4.00¢
TALES OF TERROR ANNUAL #1(C) 10.00¢

FAWCETT PUBLICATIONS

CAPT. MARVEL #22-30 3.00¢
CAPT. MARVEL #36-50 2.00¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR #2(Capt. Max) 7.50¢
CAPT. MARVEL JR. #27-40 1.25¢
WHIZ #75-112 1.50¢
MARY MARVEL #3-28 3.50¢
WOW #16-20 (Mary Marvel) 3.00¢
WOW #22-69 2.00¢
NYOKA #13-27 2.50¢
MARVEL FAMILY #32-80 2.50¢

TIMELY PUB.(ORIG. MARVEL GROUP

SECRETS BEHIND THE COMICS BY S.LEE 1947-about Lee & Timely Pub. 6.00¢

something maladjusted about those who collected and read comic books.

Don and Maggie Thompson reasonably pointed out at the time, "Now come on, people, what did you expect!? What reactions have you been getting from the 'outside' world when you've talked about your hobby, anyway? Respectful interest and 'where do I sign up' responses? Or amused amazement? Children's literature is held in contempt by many so-called literates—what response can you expect, then, for comic art, which is regarded with contempt and dismay by promoters of children's literature? How can you blame people who never claimed to be doing other than writing for mass audiences for putting things in a way to appeal to that audience?"¹¹

A few fans, certainly, were drawn into comicdom by the literally scores of articles that surfaced that year (and hundreds more when the *Batman* show hit television in 1966)—stories that invariably focused on the "incredible sums" that old comics could command.

As *Time*, *The New Yorker* (which printed a fairly credible write-up on the Kaler con), *Newsweek* (again) and others gave exposure, fans began noticing prices for old comics escalating at a faster pace. There was certainly no mystery about what was happening. On the one hand, the articles were creating a financial incentive for folks to get that collection of comics out of the attic or basement; but, on the other, it inevitably meant that the days of Golden Age comics for a few dollars each would soon be gone forever. People who knew absolutely nothing about the hobby *did* know that "comics are worth big bucks." Of course, it was comic fandom itself that had elicited these articles, either through notice of the comicons, the fact of its own unlikely existence, or the fact that a group of adults (who had the money) were willing to pay a premium to obtain older issues.

Some were able to move into selling comics full-time. Howard Rogofsky was one of them. "After I graduated from high school [in 1965], I was accepted at college in the technology area, but I decided not to go," he revealed in an interview in 1992. "I just kept on selling through the mail, except that I did it full time. I'll give you an example. In 1965, I grossed about \$15,000. The following year I grossed \$60,000. And you're talking 1960s prices too!"¹² Suddenly comics began attracting those with a capitalistic streak. Many new dealers jumped into the field. Ads for old comics surfaced in professional comics.

Comicdom began the movement that would transform comics into legitimate, insurable collectibles. Despite the negatives that would inevitably come with the change, there could be no doubt that it was necessary to move in that direction, if comics were to be valued and preserved. The next steps would be agreement on uniform grading standards, and the publication of a price guide. Endeavors were launched toward accomplishing both of these goals in 1965.

Bill Spicer volunteered to publish what was initially called the *Fandom Catalog*, which would be an "official" source of information about comic fandom for anyone interested. It would contain ads for prominent fanzines, and incorporate some of the material about the history of the fan movement from *Who's Who In*

Comicdom's Cult Of Collectors

By David Zinman

In his flowing red cape and skin-tight blue union suit, Superman looks down from a photograph on the wall. There also are pictures of Captain Marvel, the Phantom, Blue Beetle, and a doll-sized statue of the Batman. And there are thousands of comic books filling a bookcase, cartons, and an overhanging shelf stretching the width of the bedroom.

This is the east Greenwich Village apartment of David A. Kaler, 1965 national convention chairman and board member of a cult of vintage comic book aficionados who grandiosely call themselves the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors. Is all this for real?

"Collecting comics is a hobby, an entertainment," says Kaler, a 29-year-old market researcher. "It's no different from collecting stamps or coins or match covers. Practical and sensible people may have no use for people who enjoy things that aren't practical. But we say everything doesn't have to be of value and importance."

Many collectors are men in their 20s and 30s who treasure boyhood memories of the derring-do of the costumed superheroes. The 4-year-old academy's founder is Jerry Bails, 31-year-old associate professor of natural science at Wayne State University in Detroit. But the majority of the academy's 2,000 members are children and teenagers. And therein lies a tale.

Tension Over the Age Gap

"Some children don't like adults in comic fandom," Kaler said. "They think comics should be for kids. But I don't consider comics as childish things. I'm not saying they're Nobel Prize winners. But comic books can suspend reality after a day of trials and tribulations when you don't want to get involved in Sartre."

The age disparity has occasionally demanded adjustments—fan meetings have to be in the forenoon or adjourned early in the evening—and sometimes, it has produced friction. "I can take some children. Some I can't," said Kaler, a bachelor. "Some have haunted me for weeks trying to trade or buy or borrow from my collection. But less than one out of 100 is a noodnik or a noodge."

Nevertheless, Kaler, who says he has about 4,000 to 5,000 comic books has an unlisted telephone number and gets his mail at a post-office box. He shares a two-room, ground-floor apartment with two other comic book devotees who have recently become strip writers for the Marvel Comics group (Spider-man, Fantastic Four, the Rawhide Kid)—Roy Thomas, 24, and Dennis O'Neil, 26.

Despite its broad spectrum, the academy is a close-knit, bustling group. Collectors correspond, publish at least 30 fan magazines, hold national conventions and costume parties, swap back issues, and buy and sell old magazines. The price for an old magazine can be anything from \$5 to \$50. But, in exceptional cases where a single book is needed to complete a collection, members have paid as much as \$100.

Collectors even have their own language. A "fanzine" is an amateur fan magazine, a "crudzine" is a bad fan magazine, "fanned" is a fan editor, "pro" is a professional in the comic field, and "comicdom" is the world of comic enthusiasts.

"I'm no fool about this sort of thing," said Bill Finger, a stripwriter who helped Bob Kane create Batman, "but I think every human being wants to be able to escape the cynical world we live in today and return to a kind of childhood innocence when heroes thought simply and



David A. Kaler, surrounded by his collection of rare and old comic books, displays the original edition of Detective Comics, in which Batman first appeared in May, 1939. Old comic books are worth from \$5 to \$50, but some collectors have paid as much as \$100 for a single issue.

solved problems simply. I think this cult of collectors is going to grow. In many respects, it's like the Baker Street Irregulars and the followers of Nick Carter and Doc Savage from the pulp magazines."

Some pros doubt if the fans, faneds, and fanzines—who want the magazines to humanize the super-doers—have much influence on the publishers. Pat Masulli, executive editor of Charlton Comics (Blue Beetle, Son of Vulcan, Sgt. Steel), says fans are taste-conscious but not sales-conscious. The comic connoisseurs downgrade Superman. They call him deadpan, one-dimensional and unsophisticated. "Yet," says Masulli, "no one can come up with anything that sells like Superman. How can editors sell their publishers on the value of fandom in the face of that one glaring fact?"

Comic strips have been in newspapers since shortly before the turn of the century, but comic books did not appear on the newsstands until Famous Funnies debuted in 1933. Superman rocketed onto the scene in 1938 in

Action Comics. The man of steel was an instant success and the race was on to create hundreds of costumed fantasy heroes. The academy calls this era "The First Heroic Age of Comic Books."

It lasted until about 1947, when television began to capture children's attention. For the next 10 years or so, comic book publishers drifted away from the superheroes. They tried to win back their audience by experimenting with at times excessive horror, crime, war, and sex stories. Public reaction put a stop to this and forced publishers to band together and form a Comics Code Authority, a self-censoring group. The 1960s saw a successful return to the super-doers in longjohns and today we are in what the academy calls "The Second Heroic Age of Comic Books."

"No one knows how long it will last," said Kaler, "but the future is bright. More college students are finding that comics are interesting and not just trash. And so many children of the next generation will be reading comics without the stigma attached to it by today's adults."



Kaler, left, is given comic books from a shelf by Roy Thomas as Dennis O'Neil watches.

Newsday Photos by Morseman

the guidebook to COMICS FANDOM

SUPERMAN LITTLE NEMO **CAPTAIN AMERICA** **TOR** DICK TRACY **BATMAN & ROBIN** **FLASH GORDON** FANTASTIC FOUR **MAGNUS** THE SPIRIT **ATOM** **SPIDER-MAN** PRINCE VALIANT **THE FLASH** **E.C. BLACKHAWK** **DOCTOR SOLAR** SUB-MARINER **DONALD & HIS MANY RELATIVES** **JLA** **JSA** **TARZAN** **CAPTAIN MARVEL** **GREEN LANTERN** TERRY AND THE PIRATES **NEWSBOY** LEGION **FLY MAN** **TORCH** PEANUTS **SHEENA** SMILIN' JACK **BLUE BEETLE** **POGO** PLASTIC MAN SPARKY WATTS **WONDER WOMAN** YOUNG ALLIES **POWERHOUSE** PEPPER **AIRBOY** **DAREDEVIL** **BLUE BOLT** **ETC.!**

Comic Fandom. It was expected (and why not?) that pro comics would plug the *Catalog*, thus enlarging the pool of active fans.

Also, and most important, the *Catalog* would include a Grading Guide (which grew out of the Academy's efforts to formulate a Code of Fair Practice for dealers and fans) in the first concerted attempt to establish such standards. A number of dealers, Rogofsky in particular, resisted grading individual books, by simply stating that "all comics are in Very Good to Mint condition, unless otherwise noted." This was a futile attempt, and led to Rogofsky getting out of the comic book business eventually, when he found buyers for *TV Guide* were less finicky. Fans now expected to know the condition of the comic book they were buying, particularly by mail order.

As one would expect from the publisher of a high-quality fanzine like *Fantasy Illustrated*, Spicer developed a superlatively designed package, receiving the 1000 copies back from the printer in time for distribution at the 1965 summer comicons. Now titled *The Guidebook To Comics Fandom*, it offered the following standard grading system: Mint, Near Mint, Very Good, Good, Fair and Poor. The descriptions of the grades are fairly close to current definitions, with the exception of Near Mint, which is expected to fill in the entire area between Mint and Very Good. ("Fine" would not appear for some time.)

The text to the *Guidebook*, "America's Four-Color Pastime," was written by Bails, and included sub-headings like "Why People Collect Comics," "A Glossary of Fan Terms," "Collecting Back Issues," and "The History of Comics Fandom." The advertisements were designed by Bill Spicer, with a few exceptions, and highlighted most of the major zines. (The cost of a full-page display ad was \$10.00.)

America's Four-color Pastime... by Jerry G. Bails

WHY PEOPLE COLLECT COMICS

Collecting is one of the most universal avocations of man. There is no end to the list of things people collect. Every artifact of man and nature—from matchbook covers to great works of art—is, at one time or another, the object of some collector's frantic search. To the non-collector this mania must seem incomprehensible; but to the collector himself, it is a fascinating and continuously rewarding pastime.

Many people would be surprised to learn that along with coins, stamps and books, one of the most prized collectors' items throughout the world is panel art—i.e. comics magazines, newspaper comic strips, and related material. People of all ages from all walks of life collect 'comics.' Scientists, engineers, teachers, actors, artists, writers, businessmen, laborers, students, and people from every possible background spend many delightful hours with this hobby.

HOW COMICS CONDITIONS ARE RATED

In order to help establish common standards for evaluating the condition of comics magazines and similar material, we present here a set of criteria that have proven quite satisfactory in practise.

MINT (M): perfect; absolutely like-new, regardless of age; no printing or cutting defects; no creases in the cover.

NEAR MINT (N): slight wear or discoloration on edges only, otherwise perfect.

VERY GOOD (V): tight cover; some signs of wear; minor markings but but none that deface the cover; some discoloration but not soiled.

GOOD (G): complete with both covers and no panels missing; slightly soiled or marked; possibly creased or slightly damaged on the edges, but no tears requiring tape repairs except on the spine, which may be taped.

FAIR (F): complete except possibly back cover, requiring or having tape repairs of tears; damaged by the elements but fairly sound and completely legible.

POOR (P): damaged; heavily weathered, with missing pages; soiled; or otherwise unsuited for collecting purposes.


A Collector's Guide To The First Heroic Age of Comics Magazines

LISTED: HEROIC TITLES INTRODUCED BEFORE 1946,
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF NEWSPAPER REPRINT COMICS.


—*LAST ISSUE BEFORE A RADICAL FORMAT CHANGE—

Editor's note: I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the many collectors who helped to make this listing as complete and as accurate as possible. All additions and corrections are welcomed.

TITLE OF MAGAZINE	ISSUE #1	LAST KNOWN ISSUE	PUBLISHER
ACE	APR 37	#151 OCT/NOV 49	DAVID MCKAY
ACTION	JUNE 38	STILL PUBLISHED	DC
ADVENTURE (NEW 1-31)	DEC 35	STILL PUBLISHED	DC
AIR ACE (BILL BARNES 1-12)	1940	v3#8 FEB-MAR 47	STREET & SMITH



CHEROKEE BOOK SHOP



6607 Hollywood Blvd
Hollywood 28, Calif.

Hb.
36090

Unfortunately, pro comics seemed to become more parsimonious in the number of plugs they would give fanzines about the time the *Guidebook* was completed. The expectation that pro comics would regularly publicize it was unfulfilled. However, it served a need for the new members of comicdom who found their way in through other paths.

Another phenomenon of the mid-1960s, given a shot in the arm by the escalation of prices for old comics, was the emergence of stores that devoted a significant part of their operation to the stockpiling and selling of vintage comic books. They were usually located in large metropolitan areas. One of the most significant was the Able-Man Book Store in Hamtramck, Michigan.

Tom Altschuler's legendary store was the place where the nucleus of Detroit fandom would meet every Saturday. Downstairs was a normal used book store, but the upstairs, where the public didn't have access, was crammed with Big Little Books, comic books, movie magazines and all manner of goodies. "He had beautiful stuff," Shel Dorf recalled wistfully. "One whole back wall was nothing but Big Little Books—ten, twelve copies of each different title. For a fan, it was like you'd died and gone to heaven. I filled up a lot of gaps in my collection of old newspaper strips. Tom's attic was a real treasure trove."

The Cherokee Book Store on Hollywood Boulevard was one of the earliest used-book stores to specialize in comics, beginning around 1962—and one of most fondly remembered.

Cherokee was located in an old Spanish architecture building that looked something like a moorish temple, with a huge two-story tall front room. It was across the street from Frederick's of Hollywood. One stepped from the bright sunshine into a darkened temple of old books. It was run by the Blum family.

Downstairs, ensconced behind a cash register on a raised platform, father Jack Blum could barely be seen behind his desk. Rob Gluckson remembered, "We'd say 'we're here for the old comics,' or later, simply 'to see Burt.' [Burt's father] nodded us up the stairs, past his desk, and up another short stairway to a loft-like second floor. Past the [upstairs] cashier, you entered a hall, winding between floor-to-ceiling shelves full of



Photo of Burt Blum from a newspaper article about the Cherokee Book Store that appeared in the Los Angeles Times on June 7, 1965.

boxes of comics. Many boxes had covers ripped off a comic and taped to the front so you knew what title the box contained. Others simply held miscellaneous titles from the 1950s and 1960s.

"And so you entered the realm of old comics—a hallway parallel to Hollywood Boulevard, and walked its length. There was a small window set in the right-hand wall of books that allowed Burt (in his Inner Sanctum) to see into the hall—but you couldn't see him. The hallway veered to the right down another lane lined with floor-to-ceiling books.

"The Inner Sanctum was the private domain of Burt Blum. Inside were the *really* rare comics. He was probably all of twenty-one, a young man who worked in the family book shop, which had been in existence for God knows how long. Burt sat behind his big desk,

surrounded by boxes of Golden Age comics, ECs, early Barks, BLBs and popular culture ephemera. Burt didn't really want to be bothered with kids. He would only let you in the room for long enough to price your finds from the outer rooms, and to look at one or at most two boxes of the rarer comics."

The comics from the outer room were generally a dime each for 1960s titles. But they also contained examples of all the 1950s boom-year titles, the pre-super hero sf and horror EC knock-offs, Avons with art by Everett Raymond Kinstler, some bottom-rung titles from the 1940s like funny animal books.

Gluckson pointed out, "Since Burt didn't really read comics, he didn't recognize most artists. You could find Williamson, Wood and Ditko stories that would make an otherwise dog title worth a couple of dollars. We poured through those boxes for buried gold. I once found a mint comic with Frank Frazetta's first work for comics in that outer room.

"Burt would look at my pile of a hundred or so comics gleaned from the outer room, flip through it, notice perhaps a few good titles, EC-style art ... smile knowingly, and charge me between five and twenty cents a book. He couldn't be bothered with pricing them individually.

"I had a great deal of respect for Burt," Rob concluded. "Even though he didn't really like comics—he wasn't a fan like Malcolm Willits at Collectors Book Store down the block—he was the keeper of the inner gates, the high priest of old comics."

Several very extensive price lists were run in RB-CC, offering lengthy solid runs of rare Golden Age comics, which attested to the stature of the legendary Cherokee stock. In 1966, Blum estimated that he had 50,000 comics in inventory.

One Cherokee regular from this era, who shall remain nameless, admitted, "We were constantly stealing from Burt, and of course he knew it. But we were always shifting our techniques. Hey, we were amoral. We were teenagers!"

The other major comic book store in Hollywood was Collectors Book Store. In 1962, Malcolm Willits had

moved from Portland to Los Angeles to accept a teaching position, and met Leonard Brown (not the pro comic writer by the same name in New York City) who was actively dealing comics while completing college. In early 1964, Willits hatched a plan to locate the hidden caches of old comic books that were hiding in attics and basements across the US.

"I planned to spend the unprecedented sum of \$2,000 to *advertise* for them," Willits wrote recently. "My campaign would startle the world, for it wouldn't be classified ads but expensive *display* ads in twenty or so important newspapers around the country." He planned to spend the summer buying up old comic book accumulations and ending up at the New York World's Fair. How did he make out?

"I ended up with a lot of old Sunday comic sections and old movie magazines, but comic books proved elusive," Malcolm recalls. "In fact, I made only *one* comic buy worth remembering, and that was in New Jersey.

"There I met a man of about forty who had saved two boxes of comics from his youth. He lived in a nice home and headed a team of vacuum cleaner salesmen. He could hardly contain his incredulity that a man would drive clear across the country to buy the remnants of his childhood. He eagerly accepted my offer of \$200.00 and probably regretted that he had not prepared a deed to the Brooklyn Bridge to offer me as well. I just smiled." The boxes contained the first two dozen *Action Comics*, plus a host of early reprint titles, *Marvel Mystery* #1, and several hundred others of the period. There was also a small assortment of Big Little Books. Willits no longer remembers exactly what was in the group.

"It's not surprising ... because a few days later I attended the world's first comic con in New York City and sold them all to Richard Merkin for \$3,000," Willits remembers. "The other several hundred boxes of material I purchased in response to my ads were shipped back to Los Angeles. There my friend Leonard Brown was so impressed he suggested we merge our holdings and open up a store. We did, and we called it



A school teacher by profession, Malcolm Willits joined Leonard Brown to found Collectors Book Store in 1965. Left: A publicity photo of Willits. Over the years, Collectors Book Store received a lot of press coverage for its tremendous inventory of rare comic books, as well as motion picture collectables. (A photo of Brown appears on page 140.)

THE ARGOSY

COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE

\$ 5⁰⁰

Above: The no-frills cover to The Argosy Price Guide, the first comic book price guide to appear in comicdom. It was authored by Tom Horsky and Michael Cohen.

Collectors Book Store when we opened in March of 1965.

"Our store proved so successful that within ten months I was able to quit my tenured teaching position and join Leonard full-time. Our store encompassed three main fields: comic books, science fiction, and movie material. But it was definitely the comic books which carried us the first few years. Leonard put out the first real catalogue in the field in late 1965, a 36-page booklet which incorporated twenty-one separate collecting departments.

"Now, some 28 years later, with Leonard retired and my having a new partner, Mark Willoughby, we're almost exclusively in movie material. It's a lot of fun, but we miss those heady early days when people would drive up with trunk loads of old comic books they'd just found in their attics. You could buy them for a song, and you could sell them to people who loved them for what they were. These are the true collectors who *stabilize* the market because they love the stuff. They'll sell only when they have to, and they hold on just as long as they can."¹³

Collectors Book Store was known for its incredible inventory of high-grade comic book rarities (often

many multiples of the same Golden Age issues)—and, the resultant up-scale prices. It was not a place, like Cherokee, where kids could rummage around for ten cent comics; instead, it catered more to the collectors with a fair amount of cash, and the older, discriminating fans.

The first price guide appeared in 1965, too. It was a product of a small bookstore in Hollywood (on North Las Palmas Avenue) called the Argosy Book Shop. Argosy was a short-lived operation which closed down around 1968 or 1969 when the owners Dave and Virginia divorced. The price guide was a one-shot. The first ad for it was a full-page in *RB-CC* #42 (November 1965) which read:

New and unique from Argosy ---

COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE

Over 5,000 comic book issues listed!!!

Only \$5.00 per copy. Postpaid.

A MUST FOR ALL SERIOUS
COMIC COLLECTORS

The ad asked dealers to send for quantity prices. "Every comic book buyer is a potential customer." The Argosy Book Shop *Comic Book Price Guide* (1965 Edition) was a digest-sized publication (5 & 1/2" x 8 & 1/2"), printed photo-offset. Its forty pages consisted solely of lists of comics and prices, and not much else. (No cover reproductions or illustrations.)

Apparently, at \$5.00 there was very little demand (or someone advised the owners that it was ridiculously over-priced) for in the very next issue of *RB-CC*, a slightly humbler ad proclaimed: "PRICE SLASHED !!! NOW ONLY \$1.98." Even then, it was still over-priced, and it appears that very few copies were sold.

The *Argosy Price Guide* was written by two young comics fans named Michael Cohen and Tom Horsky. Horsky wrote that he and Michael began to assist Burt Blum at the Cherokee Book Shop as early as 1962. "In the summer of 1965, my best friend Michael Cohen and I started working for a small used book store in downtown Hollywood ... a stone's throw from Cherokee Books. The beat couple in their late 30s who owned Argosy Books were not doing too well. They decided they needed an edge, a draw to attract business to their modest store." Unfortunately neither Tom nor Michael could remember the owners' names.

"The owner knew that we were avid comic collectors," Horsky continued, "and he wanted to break in on the comic market, which by 1965 was beginning to look more interesting than the sagging rare book market. But Argosy had neither comic books nor any idea what they could bring. So he commissioned Mike and me to draft a price guide, ostensibly for his own use. Faced with an opportunity to make some real money from a project that sounded like fun, we agreed to charge an hourly rate for our contract services.

"Upon closer scrutiny ... the project was more difficult than it sounded. Formal pricing [of comic books] didn't exist. There was so little trading in Golden Age comics and almost no store-mediated trading in the 1950s and 1960s comics that, apart from the really visible first issues, pricing was essentially uniform: old comics were either curiosities

(worth 25 cents), or collectibles (worth \$2.50 to \$7.00) with nothing in between. The choice we made then was to allow pricing to vary more continuously between these extremes using the same metric so long applied to books—rarity.

"Once the scope of the project had been discussed with Argosy, they backed off from a 'serious' effort and gave us instructions to put together something—with the cost to not exceed \$25, or about ten hours work. That became the *Argosy Price Guide*. It was later sold through the mail with no credits given to its authors."

Michael Cohen comments, "I'm appalled at how haphazard it is, skipping titles with no seeming logic. We relied purely on memory and speculation, no research at all. We could have checked these prices with [Cherokee] or [Collectors Book Store], but I don't think we did." Maybe so, but Michael and Tom had spent the last three years assisting Burt Blum at Cherokee, and had absorbed quite a bit of knowledge. Perusing the prices in this guide, they seem quite in line with the market of the time. Some of the Mint prices listed were *Action Comics* #1 - \$100; *All-Star Comics* #1 - \$50; *Detective Comics* #27 - \$80; *Showcase* #4 - \$7.50; *Fantastic Four* #1 - \$6; *Amazing Fantasy* #15 - \$5.

While it has historical significance for being the first known price guide designed especially for comic fandom, the *Argosy Comic Book Price Guide* wasn't much different from other extensive dealer lists, and had no noticeable impact on the market. Dealers continued to do what they always did, which was price comics by the estimated replacement cost, and according to the prices they could get and what other dealers were asking.

Interest in comics of the past offered enough commercial enticement for Crown Publishers to release Jules Feiffer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes* late in the year. Excerpted earlier in *Playboy* (thus reaching a mass audience), it was the first collection of the classic super hero stories of the 1940s in book form, somehow managing to bring material owned by DC, Timely, Fiction House, Fawcett and Eisner together under one cover. It sold for \$12.95, then a steep price, but was greeted by fans with open arms. Feiffer's text is humorous and interesting (if eccentric), and the selection of stories and printing is first rate. For fans who couldn't afford the escalating prices of *All-Star Comics* #1, *Captain America* #1, *Batman* #1 et al., this was a godsend.

By end of the year, the capitalist spirit had arisen in fandom, and though it was received with mixed emotions, there is no question that its influence provided the last element necessary in ensure that comic book collecting would be more than a fad. It would prove to have much to "say" about the direction of fandom in the near future.

Not that everything was coming up roses. Paul Gambaccini discovered that he had a tiger by the tail as Executive Secretary of the Academy. The *Forum* newsletter for the board was a mare's nest of controversies, suggestions, voting deadlines, squabbles over the charter and by-laws—you name it. The attempt to organize and mobilize fans in any particular direction was quickly revealing itself to be an exercise in frustration, if not futility.



But one thing was apparent: no longer was the future of fandom resting in the hands of one man, or an inner circle. As Bails himself wrote in the *Guidebook*, comic fandom was a "movement that is still growing, and shows every indication of being self-sustaining."

Thus, when Jerry announced that "personal and professional commitments will require that I all but retire from Comics Fandom" a few months into 1966, it was no disaster.¹⁴

Footnotes - Chapter 7

¹Roy's scripts appeared in the last issues of *Son of Vulcan* and *Blue Beetle*. A blurb on the cover of that issue of SoV (Vol. 2, No. 50, January 1966) read, "Attention, Fanzine Readers!!! Charlton's challenge has been answered ... the story in this issue was written by one of you!!! Don't Miss it!" Ironically, after trumpeting the fan connection on the cover, the script was attributed merely to "R. Thomas."

²Roy Thomas, *Roy-al Ramblings* #3, *Capa-alpha* #12, September 1965.

³Gary Crowds now edits and publishes *Cineaste* magazine, which began as a newsletter for the Midwest Film Society.

⁴Tom Fagan, "One To Remember," *The Golden Age* #2, SFCA, 1966.

⁵Mark Evanier, *Feetlebaum Revisited*, *Capa-alpha* #360, October 1994.

⁶*New York Times*, December 6, 1964.

⁷"Shazam! Vintage Comics Prices, Up, Up, and Away," *New York Times*, January 30, 1965.

⁸Jerry Bails, *Capa-alpha* #6, March 1965.

⁹Hugh McCann, interview with members of Comic Fandom at Jerry Bails' house, for *Newsweek*, January 16, 1965. (From a transcript of an audio tape made at that time.)

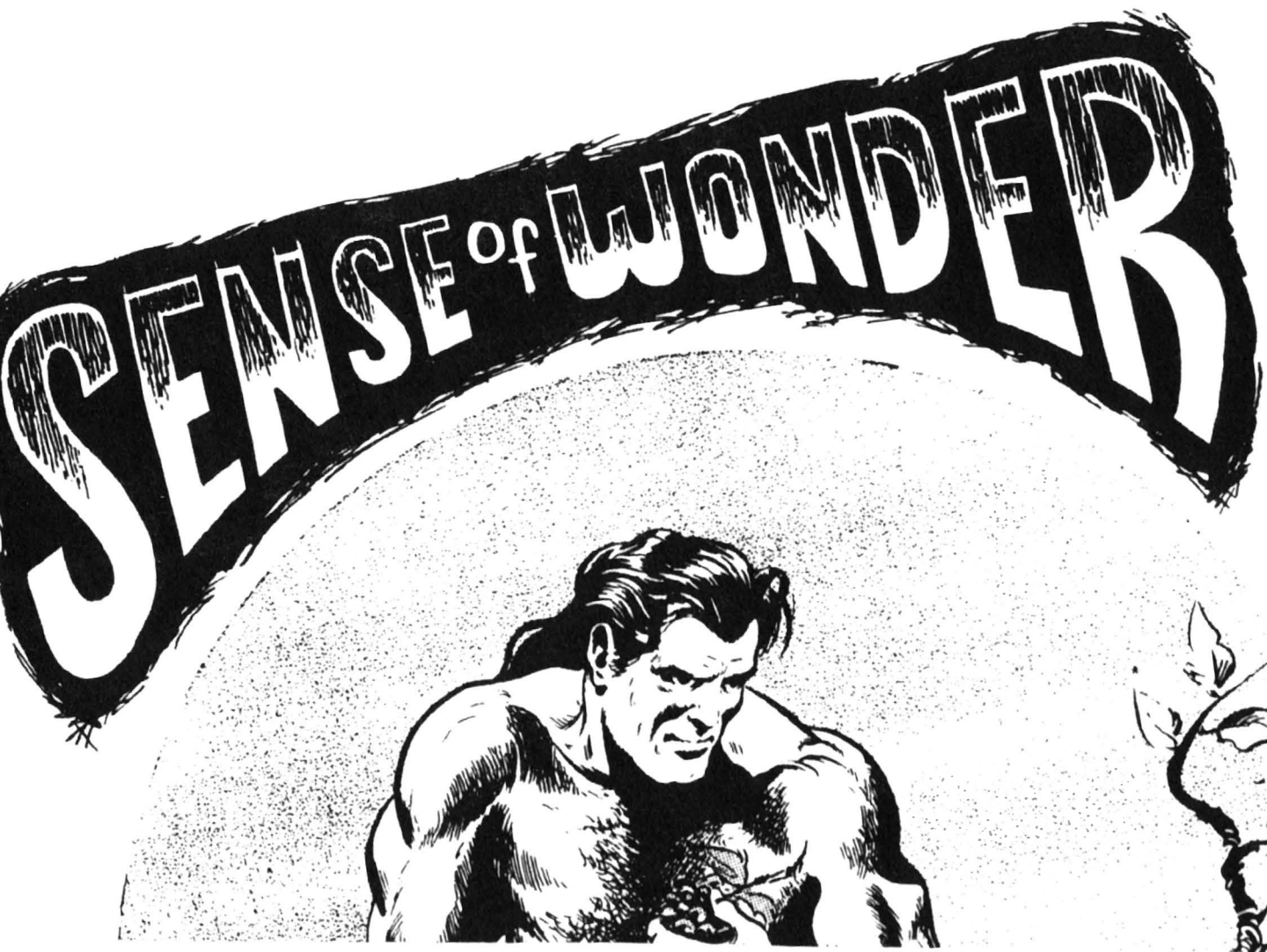
¹⁰"Superfans and Batmaniacs," various authors, *Newsweek*, February 15, 1965.

¹¹Don and Maggie Thompson, "Rainy Days," *Capa-alpha*, 1965.

¹²Gary Carter, "Interview with Howard Rogofsky," *Comic Book Marketplace* #18, October 1992.

¹³Malcolm Willits, "Gottfredson and Me," *The Malcolm Willits Collection of Mickey Mouse Paintings by Floyd Gottfredson*, March 1993.

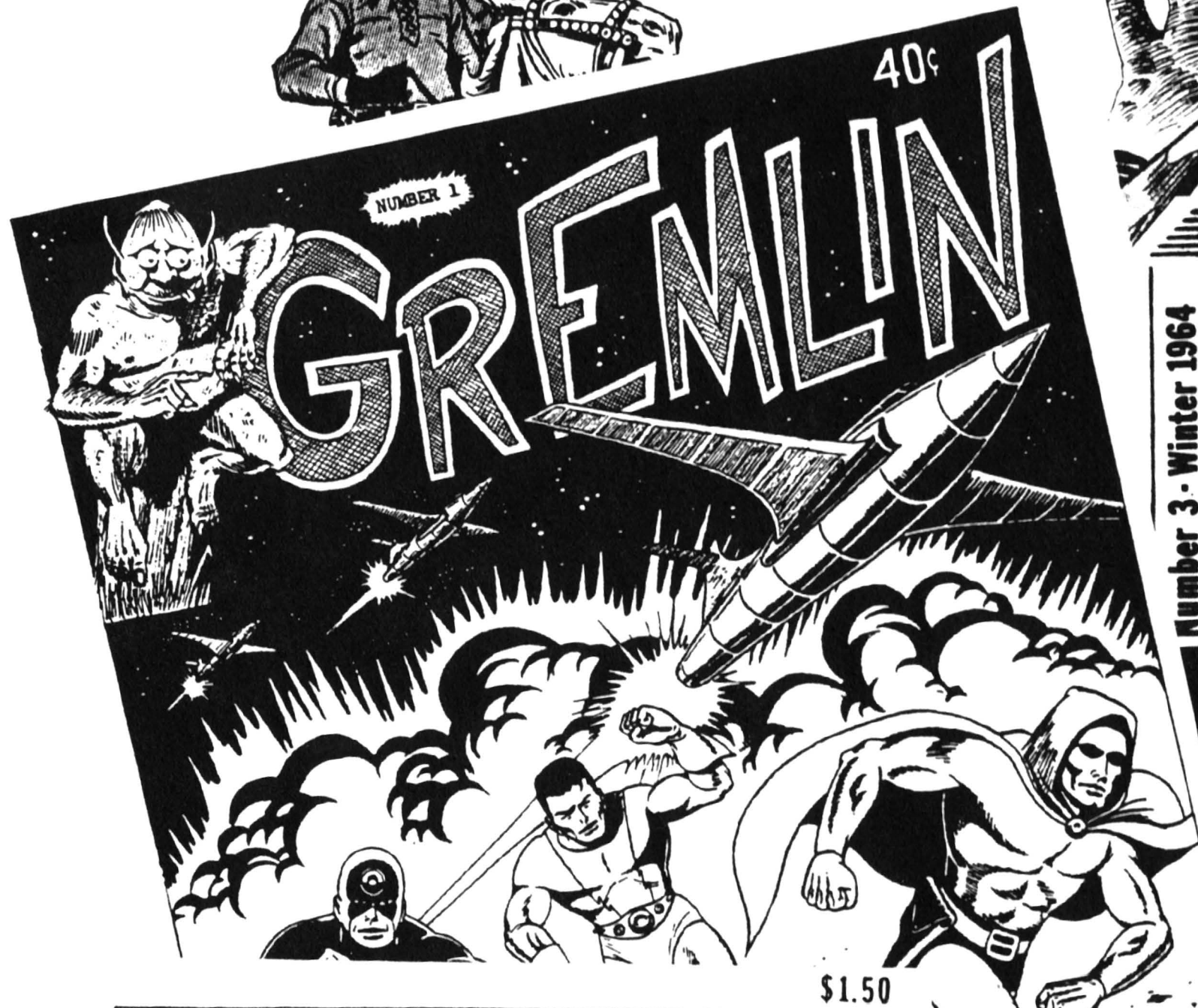
¹⁴Jerry Bails, *Capa-alpha* #20, May 1966.



MEN OF MYSTERY

NUMBER FOUR
AUGUST 1966

50 CENTS



8

Fanzine Mania

One of the best services that John and Tom McGeehan's House of Info offered was its fanzine lists and ratings. From the beginning, the brothers bought multiples of every comic fanzine published (usually four copies each). They would periodically index all the new fanzines they had received, giving a brief summary of the contents and a 1 through 5 rating. A '1' from the House of Info meant the McGeehans considered it a crudzine; a '5' was given to a zine that was recommended to all fans and collectors. By October 16, 1966, John and Tom knew of 192 different comic-slanted fanzines with a total of 724 issues, and owned 695 of them. Ninety of these zines were active at the time, ninety were defunct, and twelve were one-shots.

Despite the popularity of amateur strips, and the necessity of ad-zines, the most sought-after were the article-zines, or (more broadly) the general-zines (gen-

zines) that carried predominantly articles.

An article could have varied permutations and goals, but with few exceptions, at its center was *the dissemination of information*. Fans' nearly insatiable hunger for facts about the medium, especially the expensive and hard-to-find Golden Age comic books, led them to seek out well-researched pieces. An acceptable article was one where the reader could glean important data; an *exceptional* article was one where both data *and related insights* into the comic were skillfully conveyed. If few of these non-fiction pieces reached the heights of "All In Color For A Dime" at its best, there were nevertheless able writers who specialized in composing articles—often for fanzines that were known for that sort of fare. *Alter-Ego*, as has already been demonstrated, excelled in this sort of piece; the first Alley Award winner was "The Light of the Green Lantern" from *A-E* #3 by Jerry Bails. Ron Haydock, L. L. Simpson and

Howard Keltner helped Jerry and Roy establish *Alter-Ego* as fandom's premiere source of well-written, authoritative articles.

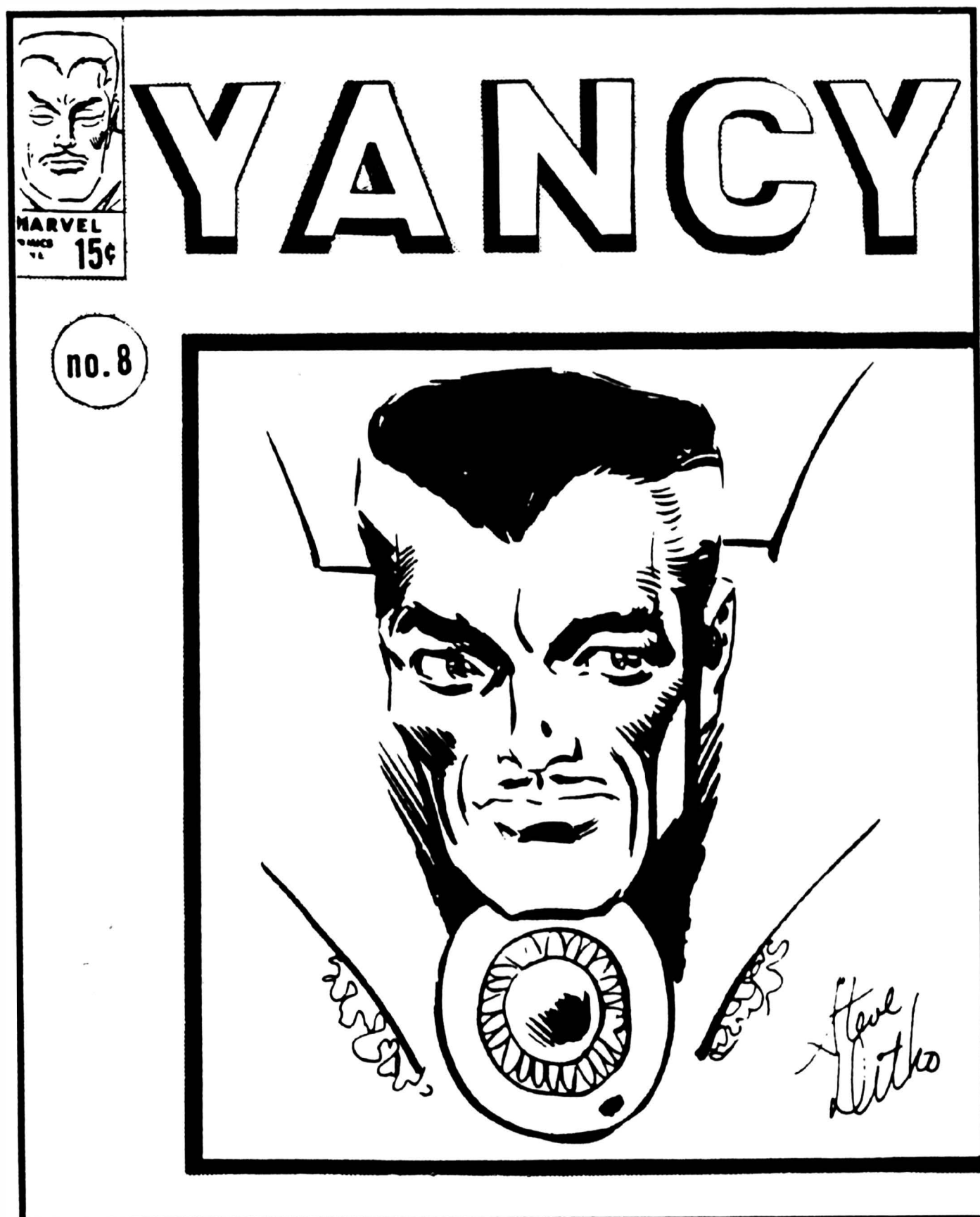
In December of 1962, Bob Jennings launched *Comic World*, which would become one of the better proponents of articles, especially *long* articles. Editor Jennings opined, "If something is worth writing about, it's worth writing about at length." His policy, as suggested by the zine's title, was to cover the *world* of comic art, not just those that starred super heroes. True to his word, the first issue revolved around a 16-page article (by Jennings) on ME's *Ghost Rider*. #2 devoted eighteen pages to "A Study In Villainy" by Tom Fagan, focusing in detail on the villains who had appeared thus far to menace the Silver Age Flash (and this in early 1963). #3 offered a piece of similar length on the *Yellow Claw* comic of the 1950s.

Comic World quickly developed a following, in spite of mediocre mimeograph printing, unattractive



Above: Margaret Gemignani attended a number of New York cons in the late 1960s and 1970s, often appearing in the costume contests. In 1974, she came to DisCon II as Miss America.

Below: Ditko's nice Dr. Strange cover for the last ditto issue of Yancy Street Journal. With #9, Golden Gate changed YSJ to a newspaper format similar to Voice of Comictim.



lay-out (though the art was occasionally printed in two colors) and the atrocious typos (especially in the early issues). Such was the thirst for *facts* that fans were willing to forgive lapses. This thirst made "The Information Center," a question-and-answer column that drew on the knowledge of Raymond Miller, Rick Durell, George Pacinda and many others, one of the most popular concepts in comicdom. The durable feature migrated to *The Comic Reader*, and was eventually adapted by Miller for *RB-CC*.

Glen Johnson was one article-specialist who emerged from *Comic World* to contribute to many early fanzines. A writer of modest ambition, but possessing a readable, informal style, Johnson made the most of his collection of Golden Age comics to add substantially to the pool of knowledge available to collectors.

Johnson worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, teaching Navajo children near his home in Crownpoint, New Mexico. His first article for Jennings' zine, "Skyman, America's National Hero," revealed his longtime appreciation of the artwork of Ogden Whitney (*CW* #5). The following issue included his study of the Seven Soldiers of Victory, and in #7 he was back with "Presenting Tony Trent—The Face," a ten-pager.

Margaret Gemignani, one of the few women actively involved in fandom, also was known for her highly informative articles. Though *Mask & Cape* (her own fanzine) suffered from poor printing and lay-out, Gemignani's articles were widely published, most notably by Gordon Love. Born in 1939, she lived with her mother in Rochester, New York, and was attending business college in 1964. She began reading comics in the late 1940s, and started collecting in earnest after graduating from high school. Though her writing talents weren't exceptional, Gemignani's collection of Golden Age comics gave her a knowledge of the era that commanded attention.

Jeff Gelb, editor of *Men of Mystery* and *Flare Comics*, also lived in Rochester in the 1960s, and recently wrote of meeting Margaret Gemignani. "I was thrilled to find out that another comics fan lived in Rochester. The fact that she was a *girl* absolutely stunned me. Margaret invited me to her house, and we went to an attic where she kept her comics, and sifted through some of them.

"To be honest, I was hoping she'd look like Patty Duke or Hayley Mills, and found her to be much plainer: tall, lanky, glasses. My romantic fantasies flew out the window. She was also a very shy person with a strange lilt to her voice. She treated me (a 14-year old kid) as an equal.

"I think I was a bit in awe of her knowledge of the field, which was on a par with fellow fan/historian Raymond Miller. And I was always pleased with the articles and fan fiction she wrote for my fanzines. It was concise, accurate and interesting."

In time, article fanzines began to specialize. 1964 saw the Dubay/Arbunich duo convert their mediocre *Comic Caper* into the first fanzine devoted entirely to the Marvel Comics Group. Stan Lee had successfully wooed most of the fan community and his line of comics was constantly improving. It was only natural that fandom would respond.

The Yancy Street Journal began in ditto with #3, establishing several long-running columns. "The Timely Years" examined the Golden Age comics featuring Sub-Mariner, Captain America, Human Torch and others; "Iz Zat So?" featured miscellaneous facts and news items from Marvel; "The Mystery of Marvel" offered Marty Arbunich's reviews of the latest issues; and "Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man" gave Bill Dubay a chance to discuss the latest issue of *Amazing Spider-Man* in some detail. Soon a regular readers' discussion column would hash over a particular topic each issue, and "Courageous Captain" discussed Captain America. This popular ongoing column, which debuted in #5, was written by Steve Perrin. Perrin was Marty and Bill's contact at San Francisco State College; they often met up with him to catch an episode of *Adventures of Captain Marvel* when it was shown on campus. Perrin had been in touch since the very early days of *Fantasy Hero*.

The six ditto issues of *YSJ* were published in the space of one year, a remarkable record for any fanzine. Marty recalled, "We would set deadlines for ourselves ... and we were good at crunching it away, and staying up until all hours until it was done." With #9, *YSJ* changed to the same photo-offset newspaper format as *Voice of Comicdom*, though it was Marty (not Bill) who did the lay-outs.

When asked what his favorite fanzine project was, Bill Dubay replied, "I honestly liked *Yancy Street Journal* best. I wasn't heavy into that Marvel stuff, but ... I liked the contagious enthusiasm that [Marty] always had. He was in his prime, discovering new things—little artistic tricks to put in there. Plus, I got to do spot illustrations. I'd go to the drawing board, and I got to do this little fun thing, or that—each job was different, but each job was fun. It was a challenge." One of the least fun parts, however, was typing and re-typing the columns to justify the text.

YSJ offered a good mix of Marvel news, columns, and articles. The articles tended to be brief, but they were ably written and nicely augmented by photos,

artwork and cover reproductions. It ended with issue #12 (January 1966), coinciding with the announcement that Steve Ditko was leaving the House of Ideas.

Batmania, the fanzine especially for Batman fans, originated at almost the same time as *YSJ*. (#1 was dated July 1964.) Biljo White had avidly followed the adventures of the Caped Crusader for two decades, and had been unhappy with the sorry state that his favorite strip had reached. When Julius Schwartz assumed the editorship of *Batman* and *Detective Comics*, White decided the time had come to rally support behind those titles. "After completing and printing the entire run of *Batmania* #1, I sent a copy to editor Julius Schwartz," he said. "I was so confident with the finished issue that I just knew he'd grant permission, and luckily, he did. However, as I told him, I was ready to destroy the entire print run if he vetoed my plan." The first issue was an instant sell-out and Alley-winner, and soon the print run soared over 500 copies per issue.

Batmania was a charming, visually appealing fanzine that published many ground-breaking articles on the Dynamic Duo. #2 headlined White's own "Batman Before Robin," the first in-depth portrait of Bruce Wayne's alter ego in the year when he was a lone avenger. Readers who were familiar with the gentle Boy Scout leader that Batman had become by 1960 were shocked by a recreation of the famous panel where Batman fires a machine gun from the Batplane. ("Much as I hate to take human life, I'm afraid *this time* it's necessary!")

The fanzine also carried the news from Schwartz that Batman's "New Look" had been well-received. Neither Schwartz nor White could know, then, that for a short period a couple of years later, *Batman* would become the world's best-selling comic magazine—for reasons unrelated to the quality of the comic itself.

One of the most interesting items to be published by White was Bob Kane's "An Open Letter To All Batmanians Everywhere." It was written on September 14, 1965, in response to an article that

Jerry Bails had written in *Capa-alpha*. Bails' "If The Truth Be Known—A Finger In Every Plot" was based on a discussion Tom Fagan had with Bill Finger, who claimed that Bob Kane had not been the sole creator of Batman and his supporting cast.

Kane wrote, "Now, Biljo, I would like to emphatically set the record straight.... I, Bob Kane, am the sole creator of Batman. I read [the Bails article] and it seemed to me that Bill Finger has given out the impression that he and not myself created the Batman, as well as Robin and all the other leading villains and characters. This statement is fraudulent and entirely untrue! I challenge Bill to repeat those statements in front of me. I will admit that he was influential in shaping up the strip...." Kane concluded his lengthy letter by appointing Biljo as the "unofficial guardian of pertinent *Batmania* folklore." White delayed printing Bob Kane's missive while he sought clarification from Kane on several points; when his letters weren't answered, Biljo decided to go ahead and publish the entire "Open Letter" in the *Batmania Annual* in 1967. Since the revelations of Finger's many contributions to the Batman mythos from the first story forward, many fans have considered Bill Finger a co-creator of the Caped Crusader.

"*Batmania* was my best effort as a part of comicdom," Biljo commented. "I believe my work on it should be regarded as a blueprint for producing a fanzine." He continued for seventeen issues, then passed it on to others; it was published sporadically by Rich Morrissey until 1978.

Some who tried to write articles weren't up to the task, especially younger fans who didn't have enough comics to present any kind of coordinated information. "Articles" would often rely heavily (or exclusively) on story synopses, sometimes from a single old comic book.

In reaction to a spate of superficial, poorly conceived articles, Rick Weingroff launched one of the most singular article-zines of the era, *Slam-Bang*. In the first issue (April 1964), he wrote: "Over a period of three years ...

BATMANIANIANS


THE BATMANIANIANS HEREBY CERTIFY THAT

OFFICIAL LIFE-TIME NO. 291

BILL SCHELLY

HAS BEEN ACCEPTED AS AN INTERESTED BATMAN FAN AND IS ELIGIBLE FOR ADVANCEMENT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION.

ROBINS: ☆☆☆A



BATMANIA

No. 4

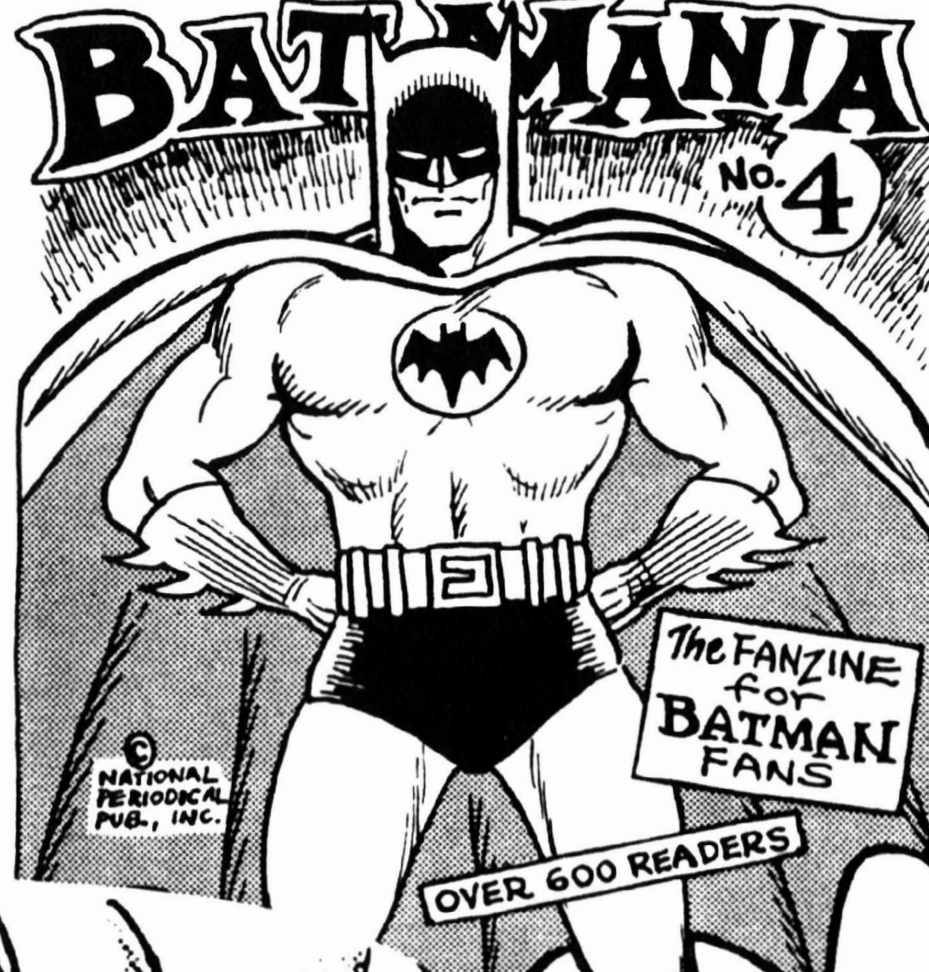
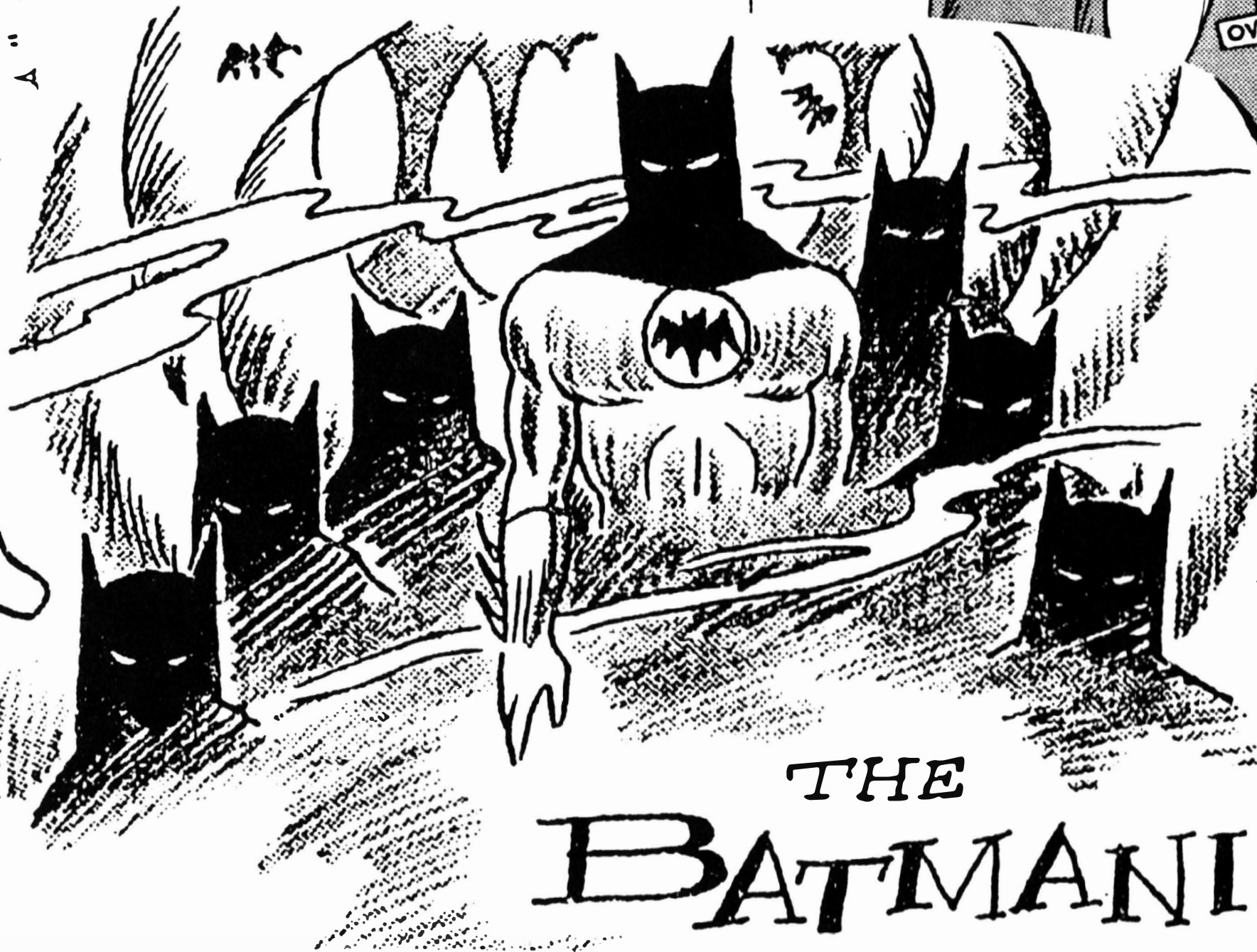
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The FANZINE for BATMAN FANS

OVER 600 READERS

From: WITE '15

COLUMBIA MO. 65202

ALL BATMAN ILLU'S by
BILJO WHITE

THE BATMANIANIANS


BATMANIA

No. 1

THE NEW LOOK

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The FANZINE for BATMAN FANS

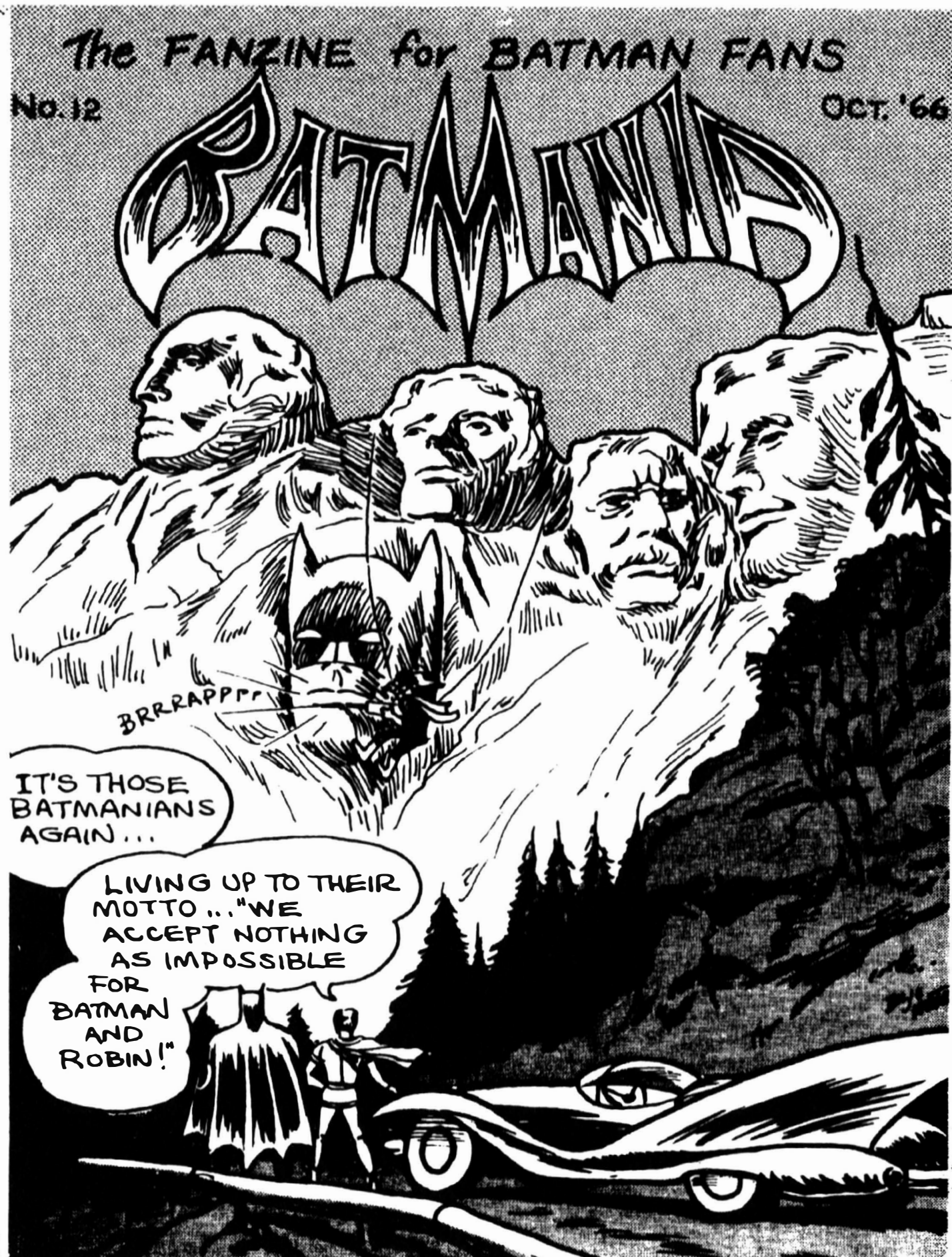
No. 12 OCT. '66

BATMANIA

BRRRAPPP

IT'S THOSE BATMANIANIANS AGAIN...

LIVING UP TO THEIR MOTTO... "WE ACCEPT NOTHING AS IMPOSSIBLE FOR BATMAN AND ROBIN!"



I've been able to formulate definite conclusions as to what type of article belongs in a fanzine, what type of article is worthwhile and what type of article is merely 'trash.' My philosophy is quite simple: 1) Every effort must be made by the editor of a fanzine to assure his readers of quality [including correct grammar]; 2) Only story narration which is essential to the development of an idea will be included; and 3) An editor should publish what he believes in."¹

Weingroff's early writing, as a high school student, began with "Rocketeer Gossip" for the SFCA, yet even then his writing was literate and clever; by the time he was a college student, it took a scholarly turn, and *Slam-Bang* mirrored this sophisticated, critical approach. In #5, "Inner Or Other: A Theory On Superman" read like a Masters thesis at times. Verbose though he may have been, Weingroff's writing was clear and coherent. *Slam-Bang* (changed to *Tint* with #6, the last issue) was not for everyone, but Weingroff's multi-part article on Marvel entitled simply "Lee" won Alley Awards.

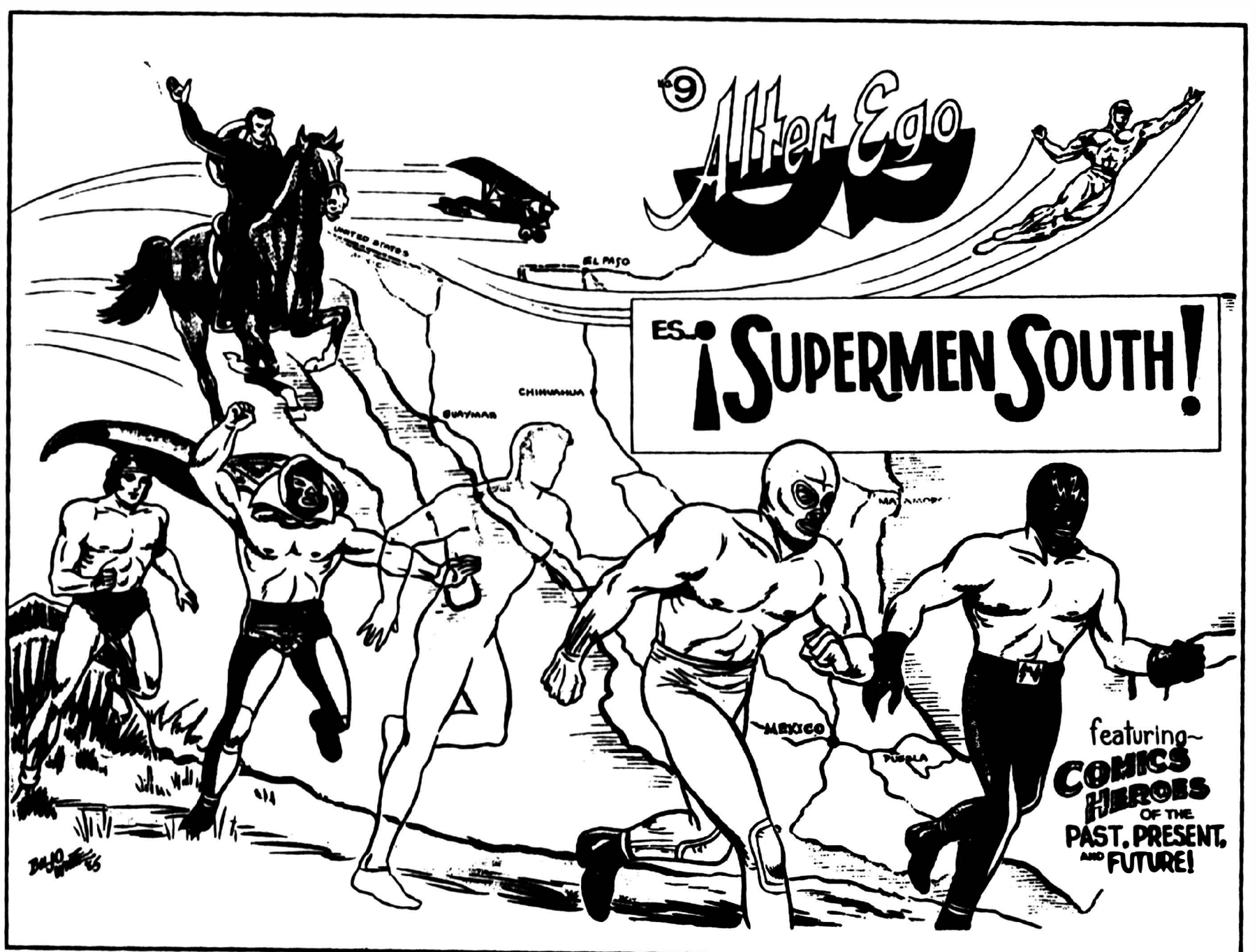
There are oddities to be found among even the most obscure fanzines. A prime example is a horror novelette called "I Was A Teenage Grave Robber" which was serialized in 1964 in a little hectographed publication called *Comics Review*. The author was Stephen King.

"Steve was a high school kid in rural Pownal, Maine, who was a couple of years older than me," editor Michael Garrett wrote. "We were penpals, and shared with each other our mutual dream of becoming successful writers one day. I was so impressed with Steve's original material that I featured it in *Comics Review*. I wasn't in the least surprised when King became a superstar author in the mid-seventies, because his talent was obvious from the beginning." (The same novelette was reprinted in Marv Wolfman's *Stories of Suspense* fanzine under a different title.) Garrett would also find success in the writing field, with his novel *Keeper* and the ten volumes of the *Hot Blood* anthology series from Pocket Books, co-edited with lifelong friend Jeff Gelb.



Above: Though Ronn Foss drew two more adventures of the Eclipse in the 1970s, "The Mystery of Malimoor!" in *Alter Ego* #8 was the last one with co-creator and scripter Drury Moroz.

Below: Cover to *Alter Ego* #9 (August 1965). *Alter Ego*'s first (and only) wrap-around cover displayed various Mexican costumed heroes.



THE FIRST GREAT DAYS OF BLACKHAWK



by DERRILL ROTHERMICH and ROY THOMAS

Art by BILJO WHITE

As new comic readers and collectors discovered the world of fanzines, the demand for the most popular and essential fan publications forced them to graduate from home duplication systems (ditto, mimeo) to photo-offset. In general, the article, news and ad fanzines outsold those featuring amateur comic strips; the circulation leader in the middle of the decade was *Alter Ego*. An estimated *eight to ten thousand copies* of *AE* #4 through #9 were probably distributed (including the SFCA reprints of #5 and 7).

Roy Thomas had perfected the *AE* formula, and followed the excellent #7 with two more fine issues. #8 sported a spectacular Blackhawk cover by Biljo. The Blackhawk article "When Hawkhood Was In Flower" by Derrill Rothermich and Roy Thomas started things off, followed by a Doc Savage piece by Robert Hopkins, a high school teacher and colleague of Roy's from Sullivan, Missouri. A JSA piece by Glen Johnson and the second Eclipse strip by Moroz/Foss ("The Mystery Of Malimoor!") were top-notch.

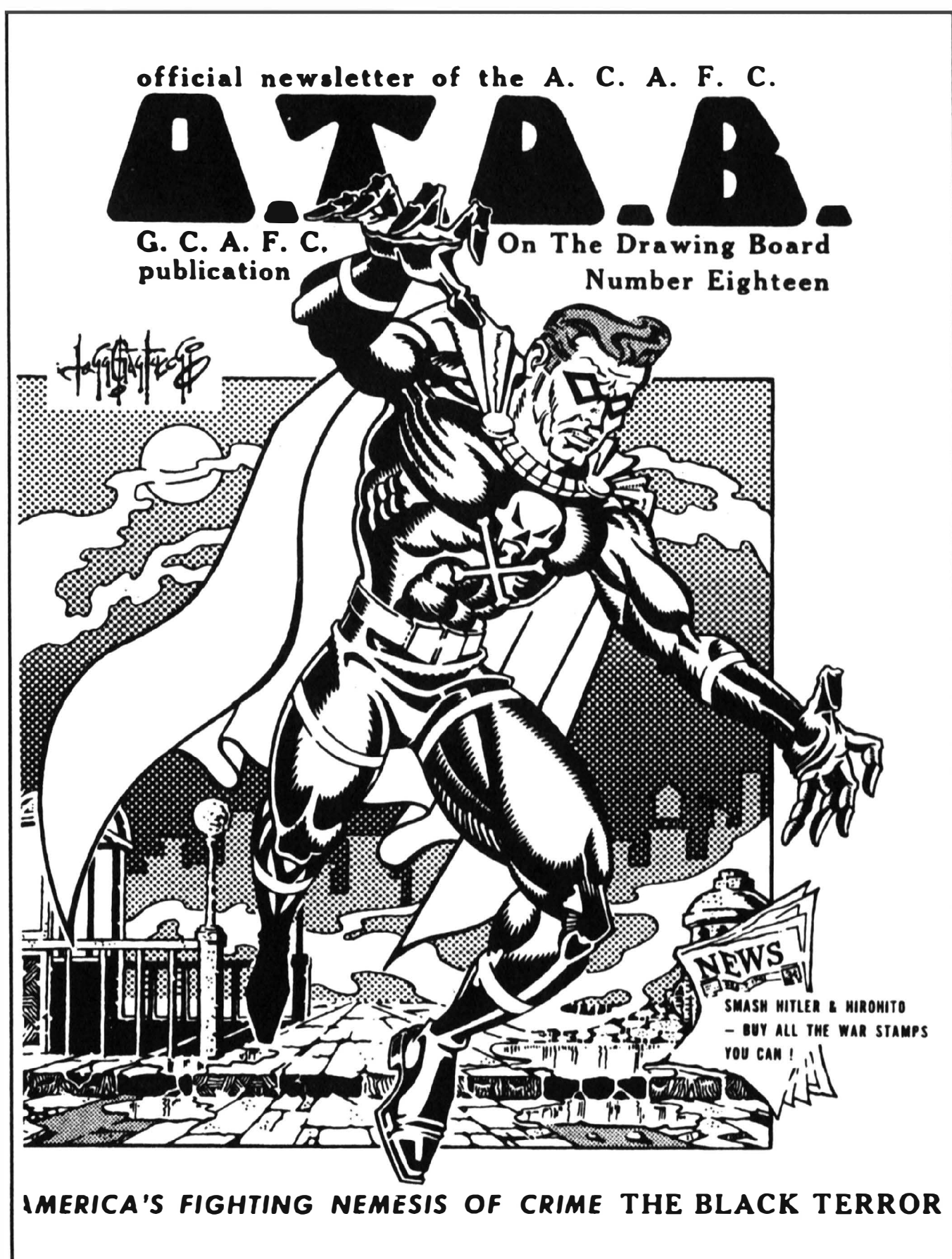
"I'd become interested in Mexican and Latin American comics when I spent a few weeks on the west coast of Puerto Rico in the summer of 1963," Roy recently wrote. "Then, the next summer, I had gone to Mexico with a girl friend for a month, and amassed more Mexican comics there, as well. This inspired me to try to get an article on Mexican heroes for *Alter Ego*." Fred Patten volunteered to write the piece, and the first part ("Supermen South!") rounded out *AE* #8.

AE #9 maintained the standards of previous issues in terms of contents, with a "photo album" called "Otto in Binderland" (photos of Binder and other Fawcett pros) and samples of the unsold Tawky Tawny syndicated strip by Binder and Beck. Also on hand was the second part of "Supermen South!" Roy always regretted that he was unable to print the third and final part, but this was his last issue (for some time), delivered to the printer just days before he moved to New York.

"The printer really screwed me on *AE* #9," Roy pointed out ruefully. "Because he'd done a pretty good job on #8, I made the mistake of paying him in advance for #9, since I was about to leave for New York to take the job at National. I was flabbergasted when he did such a lousy job, as if he tossed away all his standards as soon as there wasn't much I could do to him, or much chance that I'd sue him or even physically confront him. It took much longer than it should have to get him to print the thing at all, and then he batted it out."

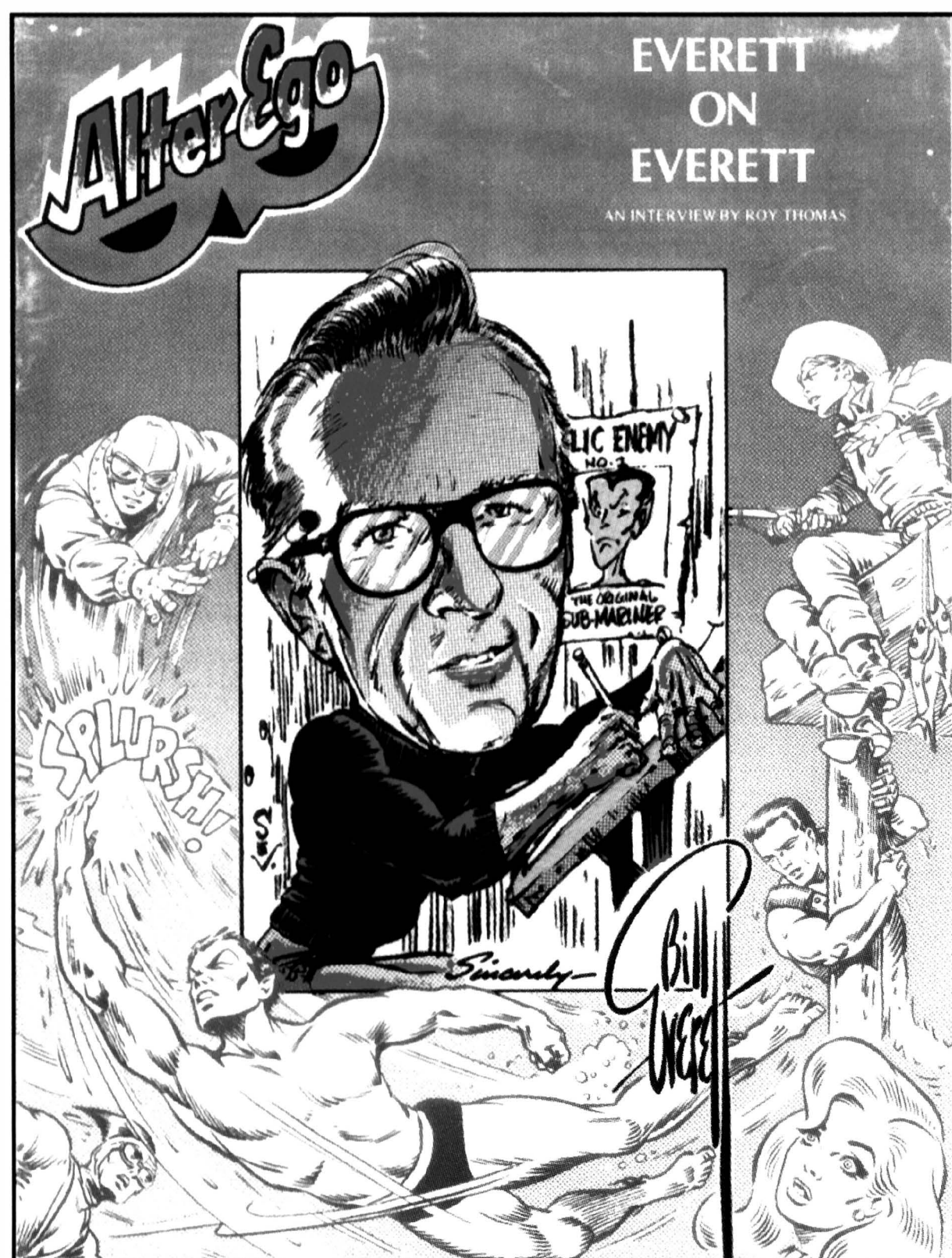
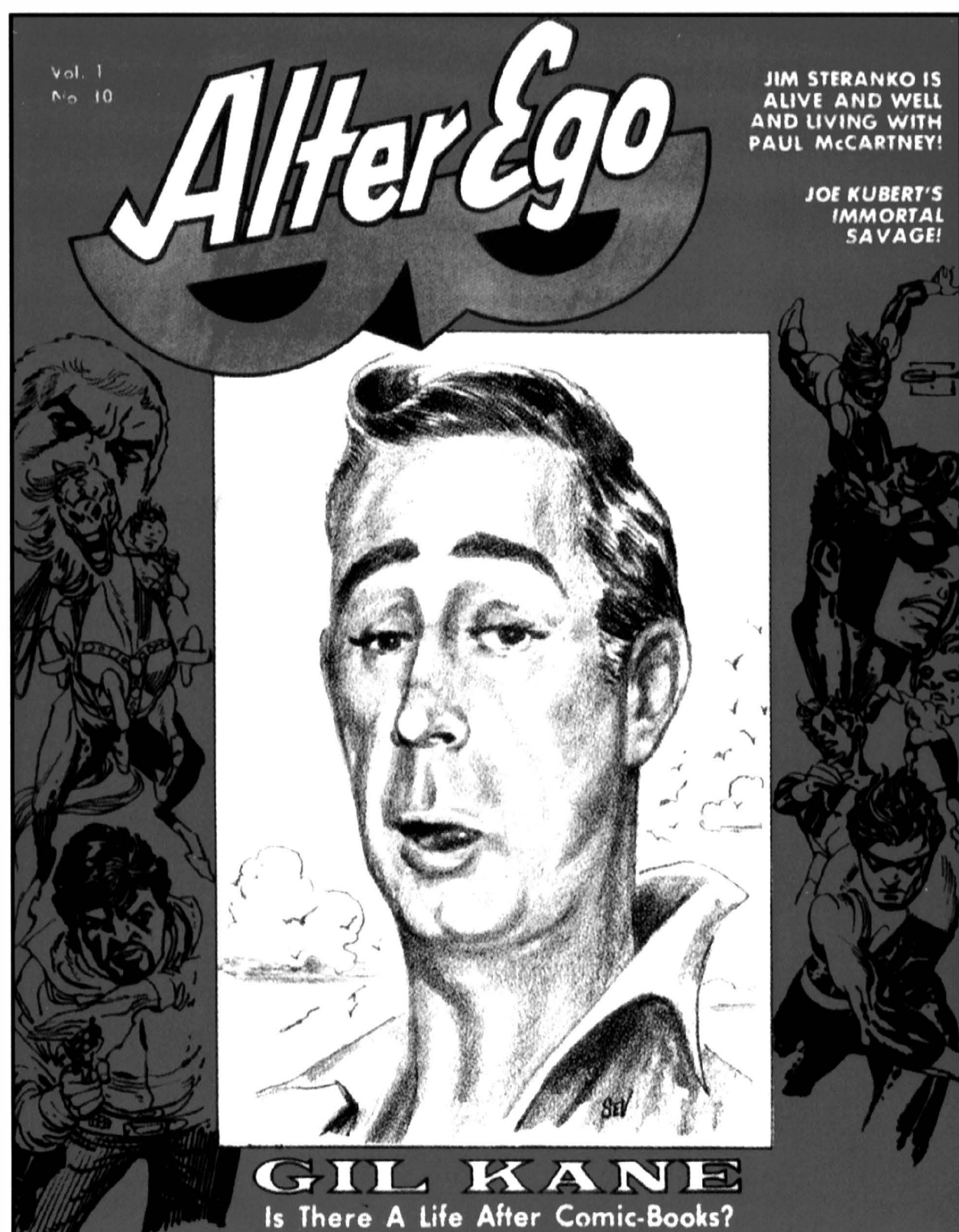
The Comic Reader survived another bumpy change of editors, this time from Glen Johnson (his last issue was #41, in September 1965) to Derrill Rothermich, with Jim King acting as publisher. Dave Kaler continued to be a prime source of pro news.

The big difference when Rothermich took over was the change from ditto to photo-offset. By using reduced type, he was able to hold the price down to 30 cents per copy. When the *TCR* editorship was passed to Robert Schoenfeld of St. Louis with #51, its name was changed to *On The Drawing Board* but looked the same in most other respects. The next editor, Mark Hanerfeld, carried on from #65, returning to the original *TCR* name. Somehow, with all these changes,

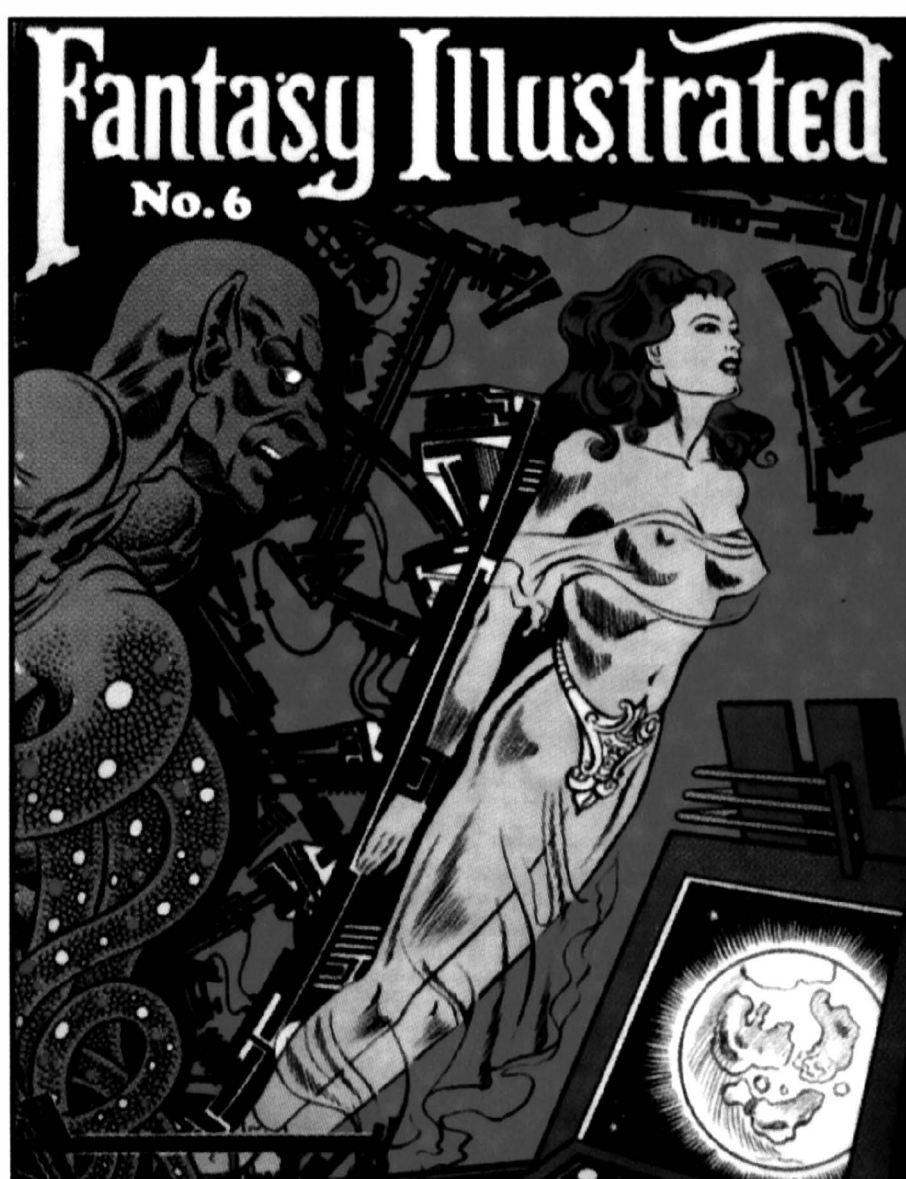
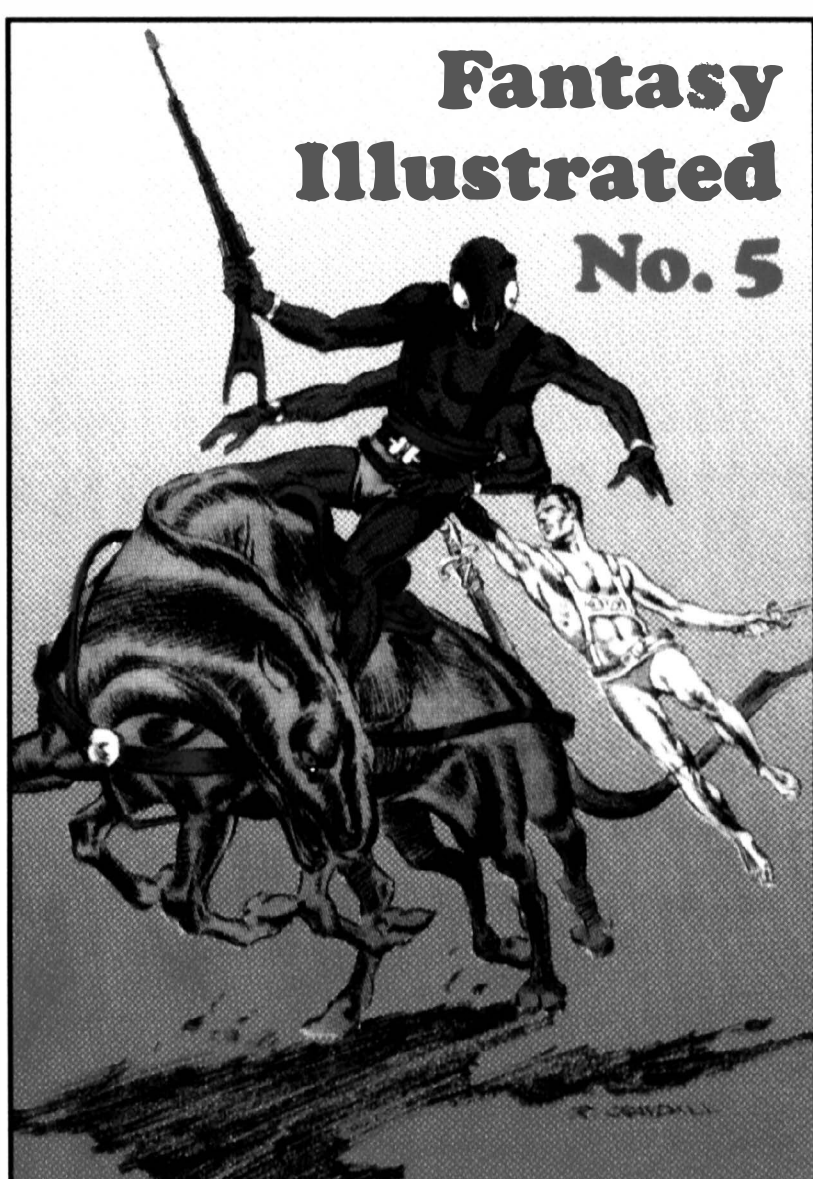
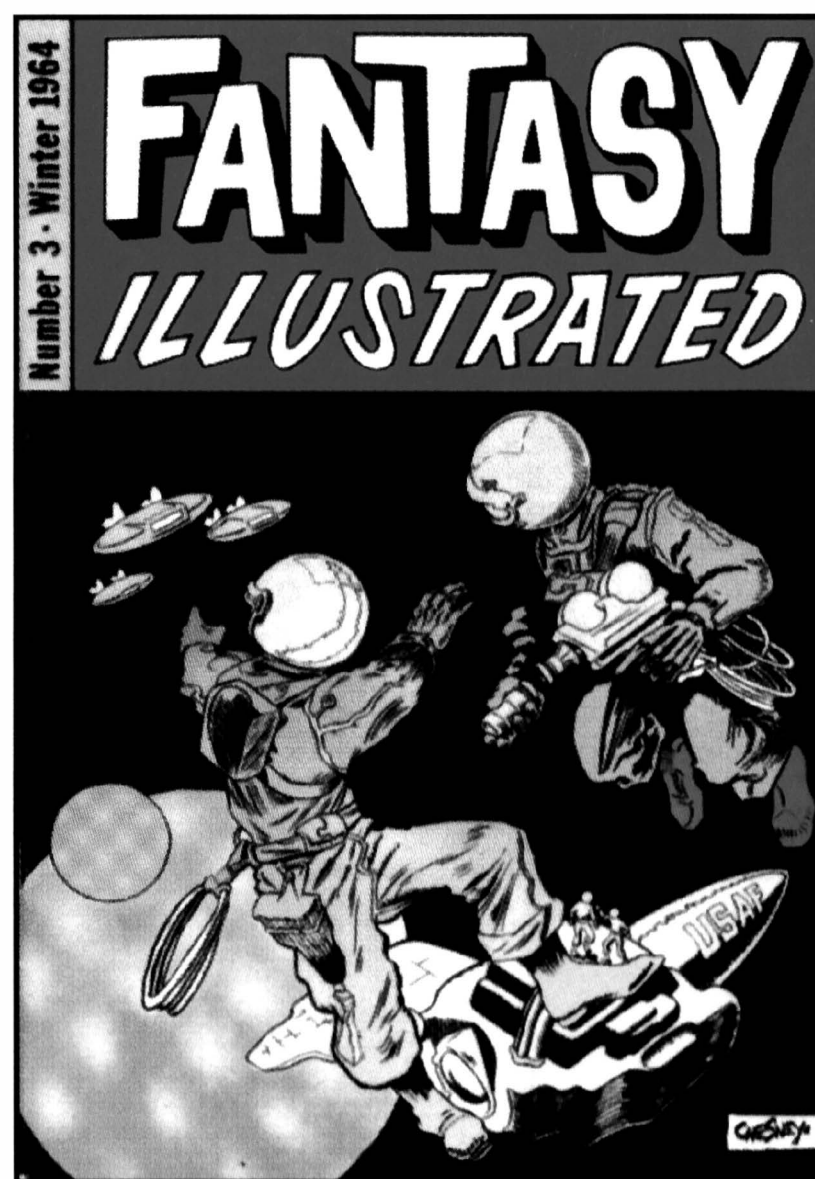


John Fantuccio

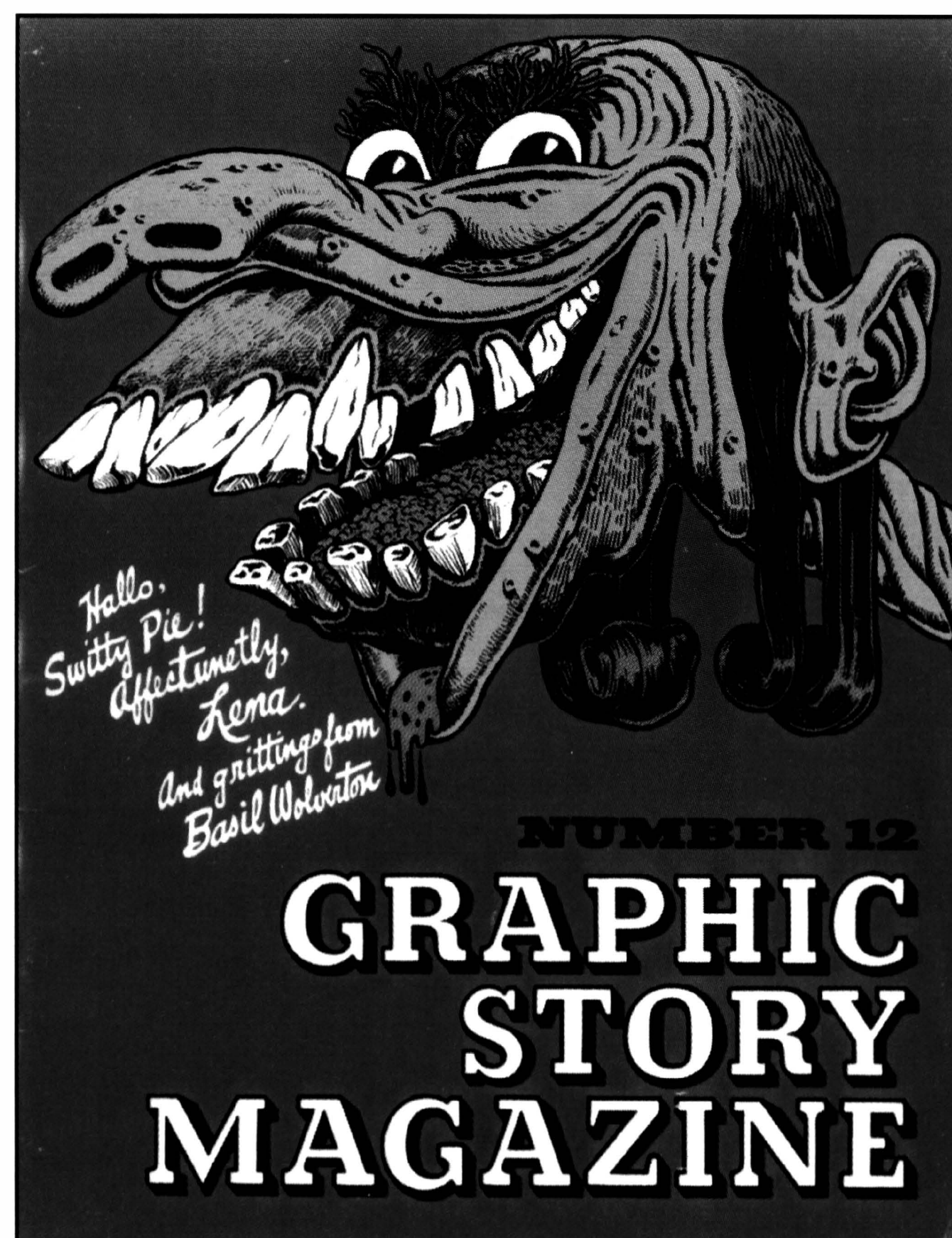
FANZINE COVER GALLERY



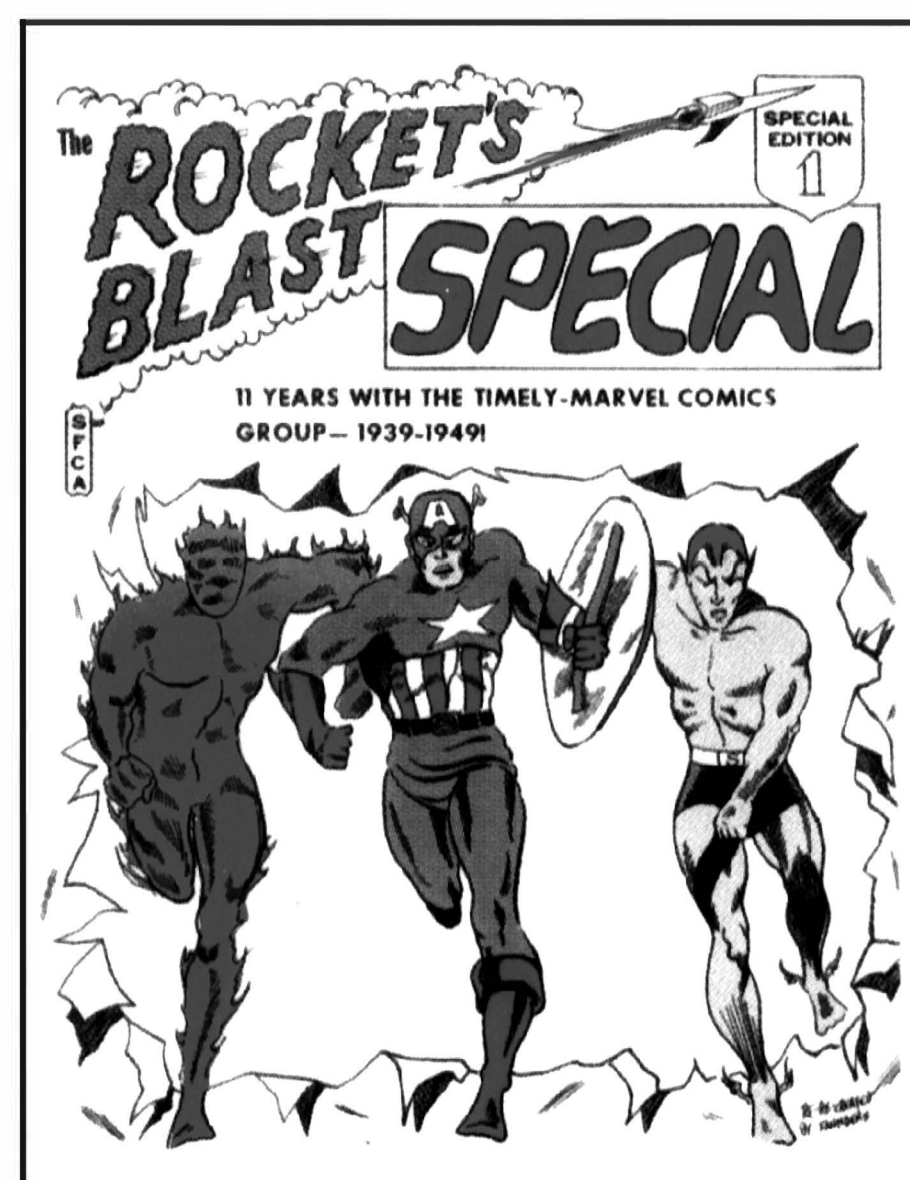
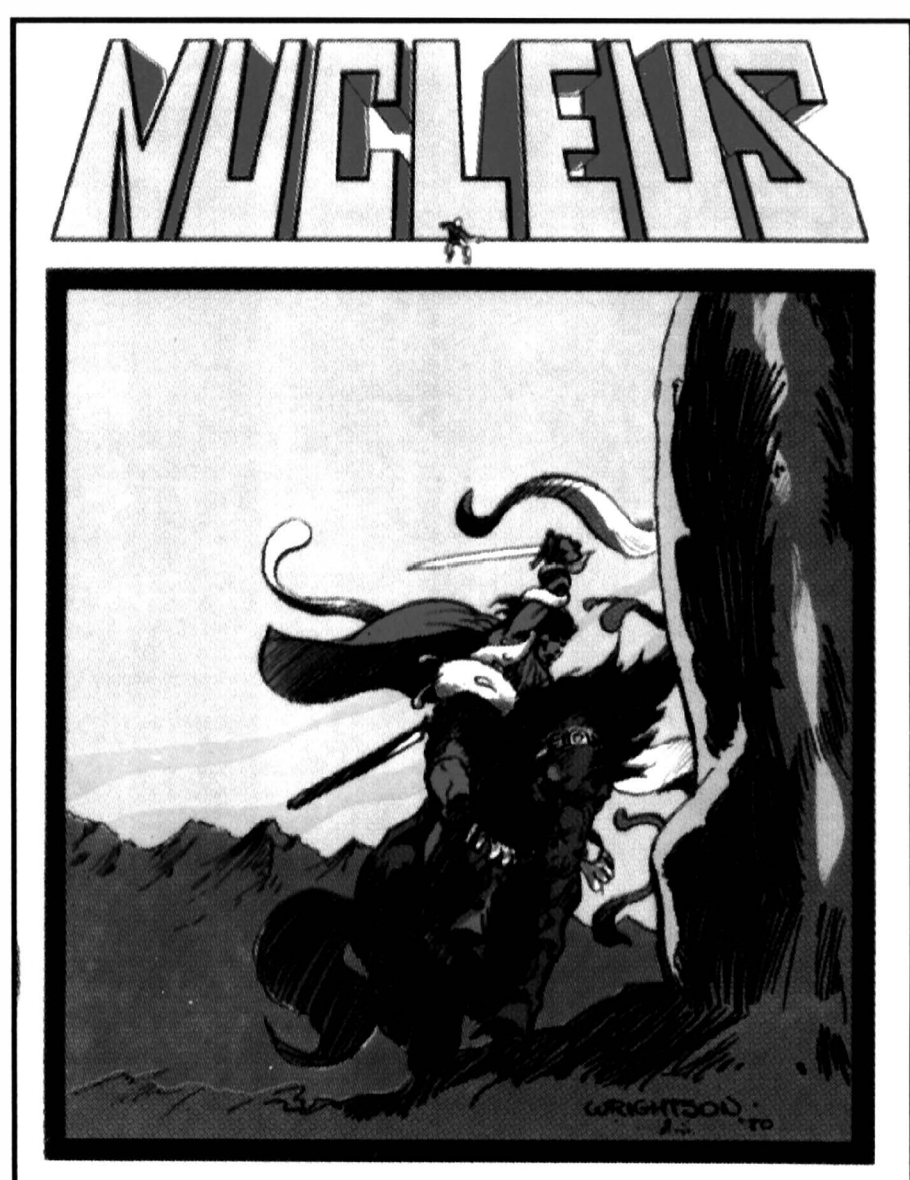
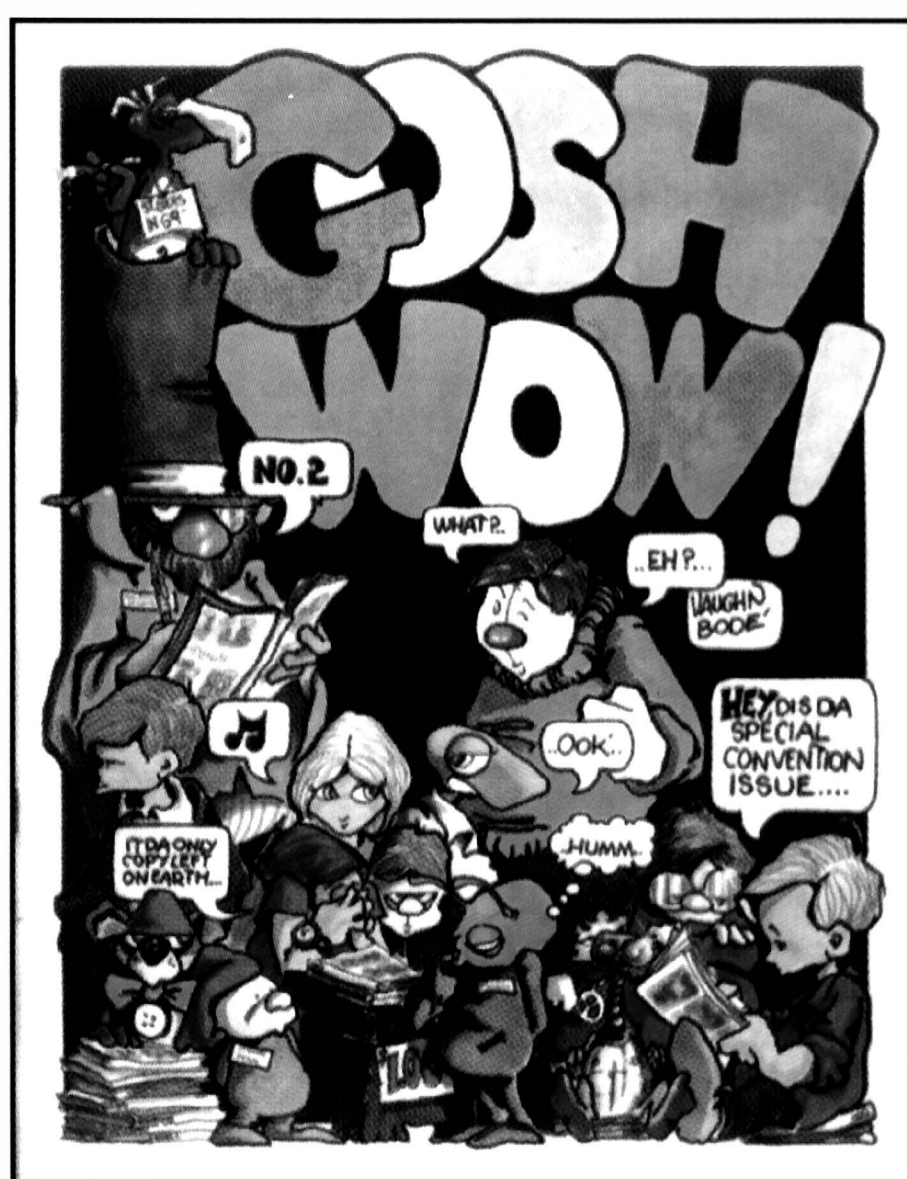
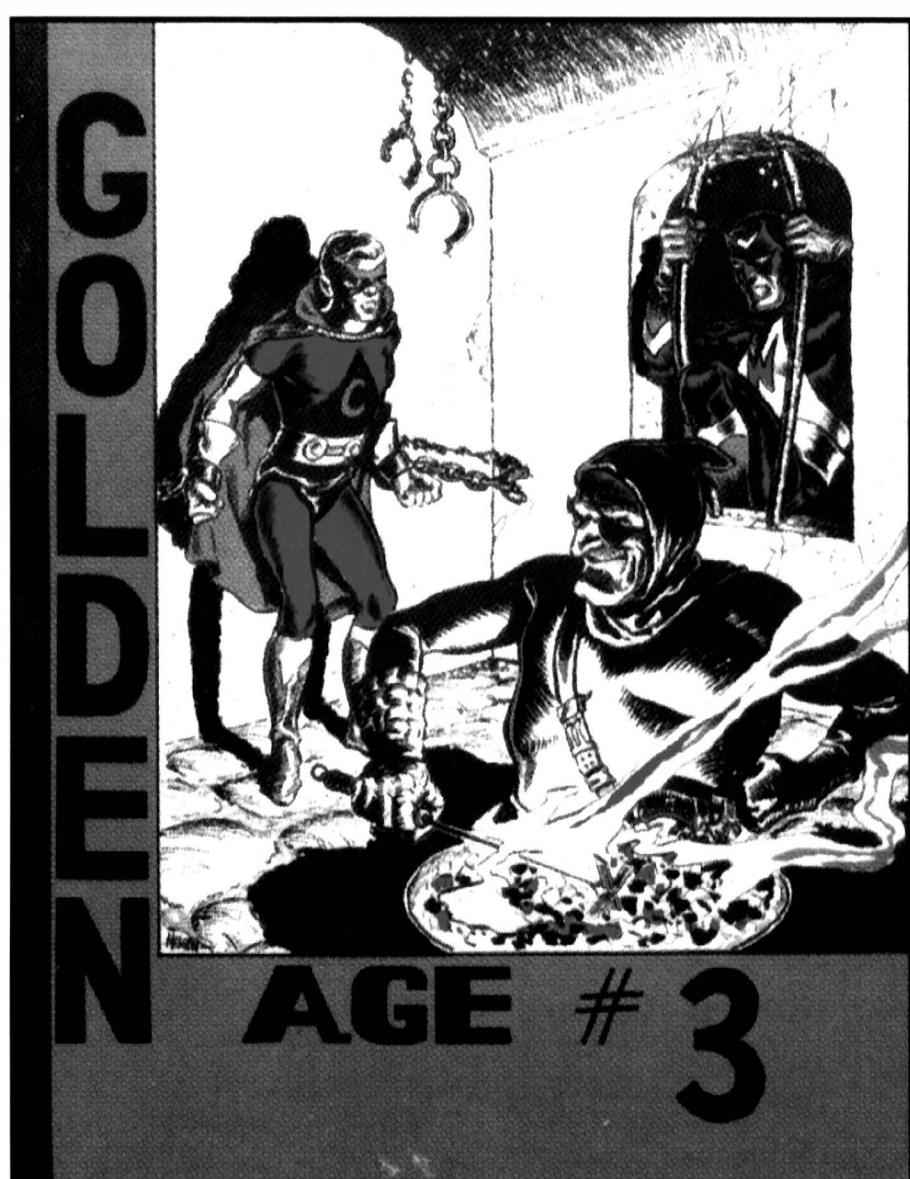
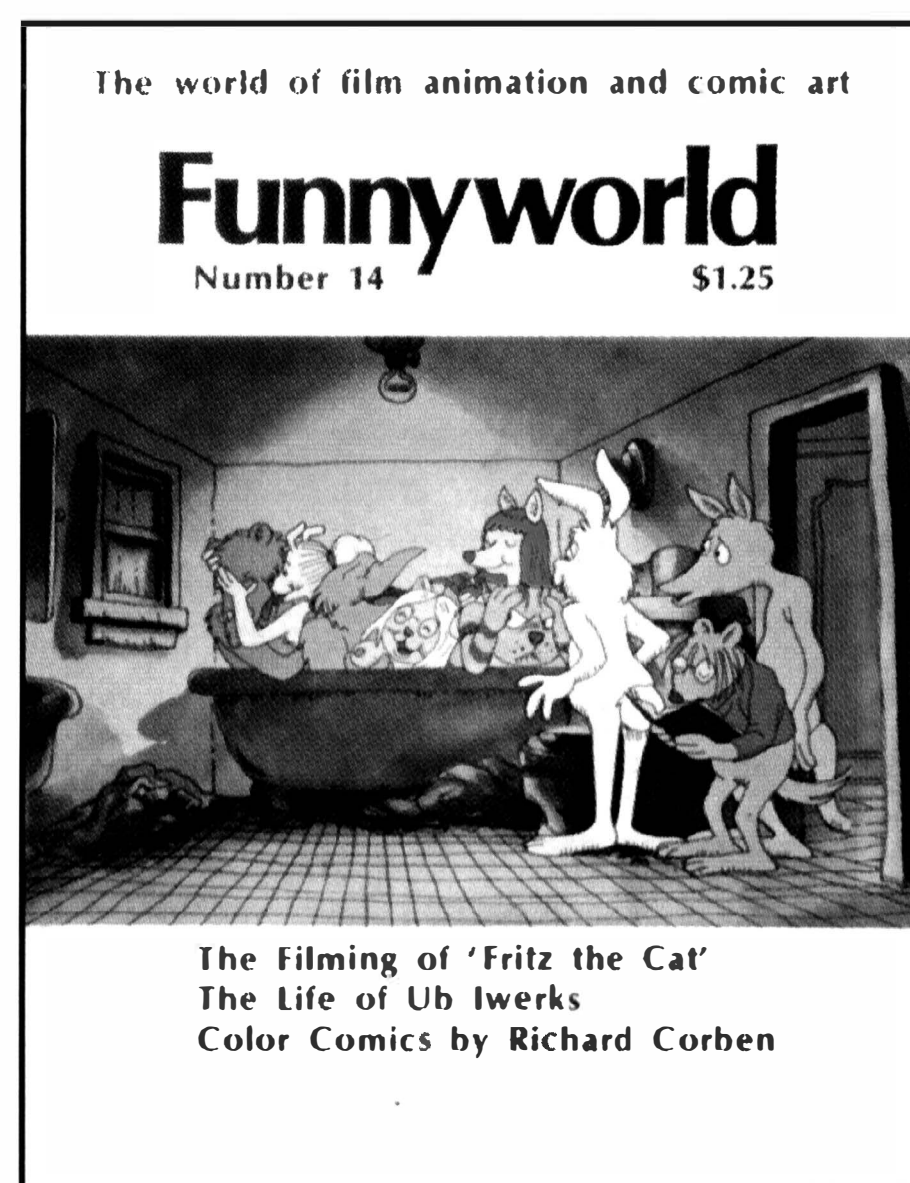
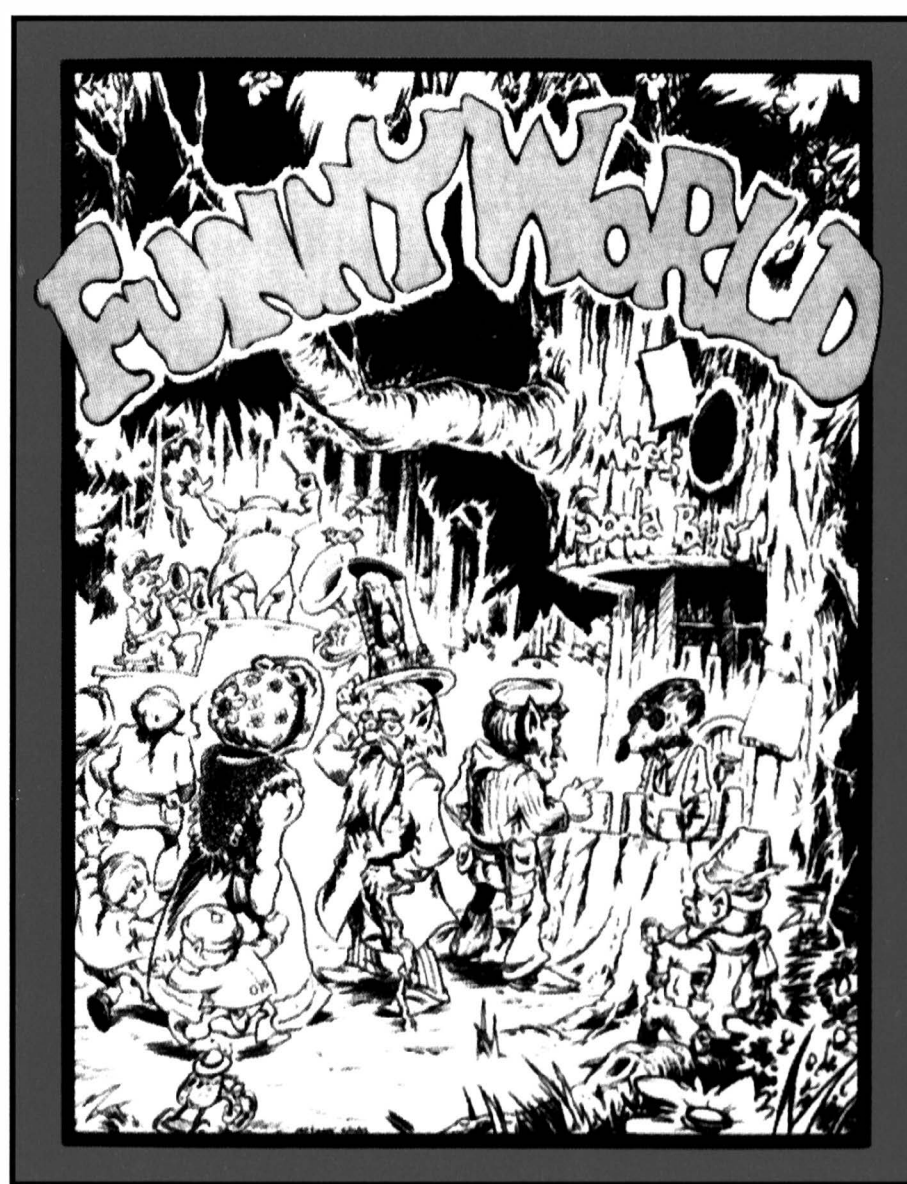
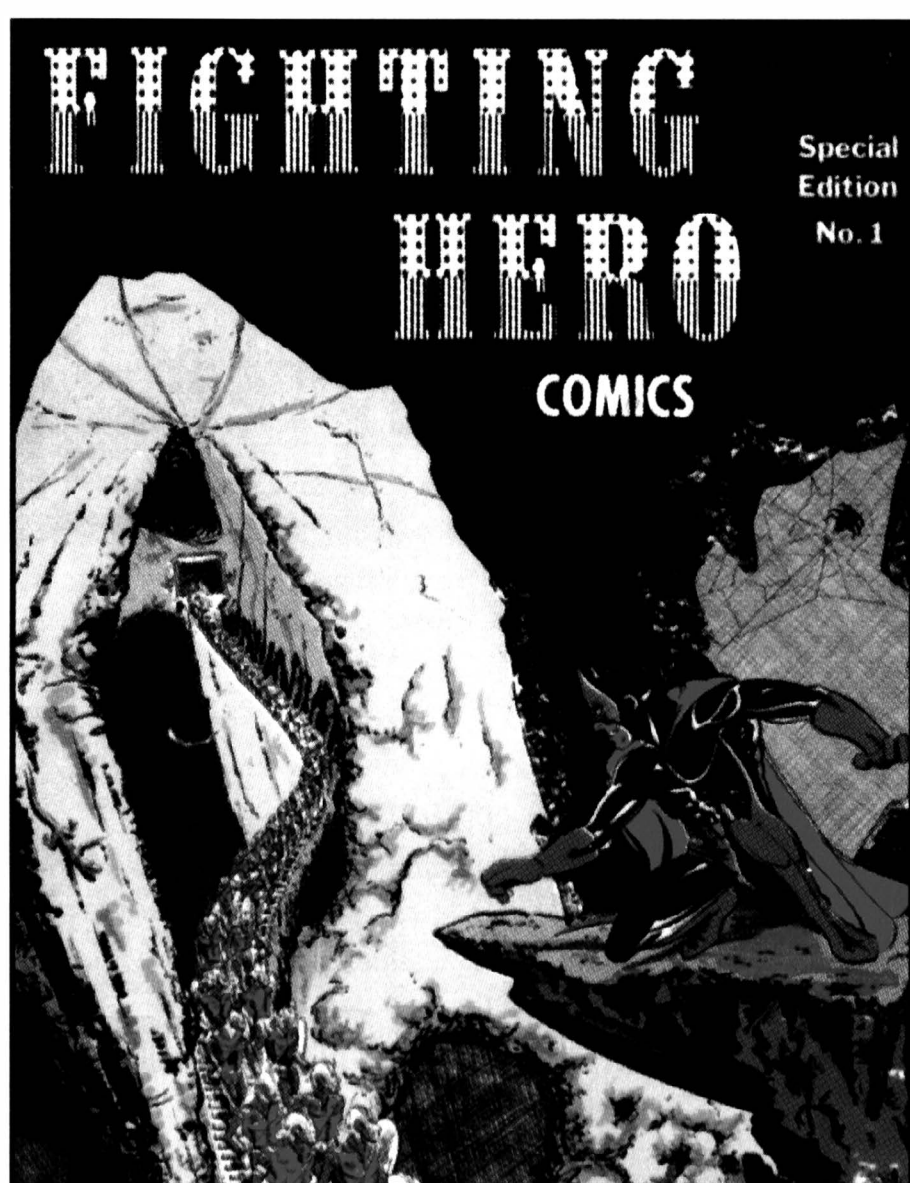
Note: Names shown are the cover artists. Row 1: *Alter Ego* #7 (1964), Biljo White; *Alter Ego* #8 (1965), Biljo White. Row 2: *Alter Ego* #10 (1969), Marie Severin & Gil Kane; *Alter Ego* #11, Marie Severin & Bill Everett.



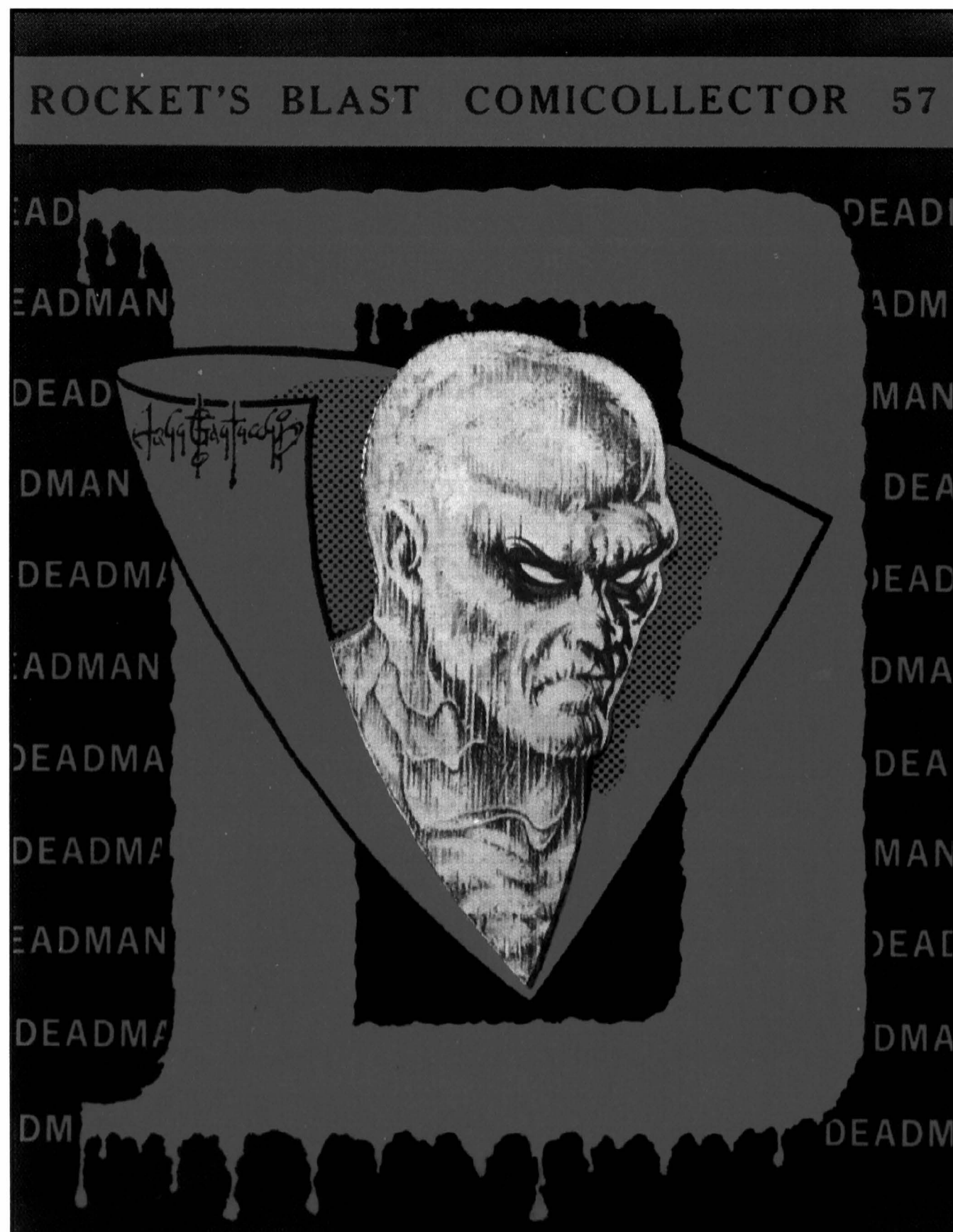
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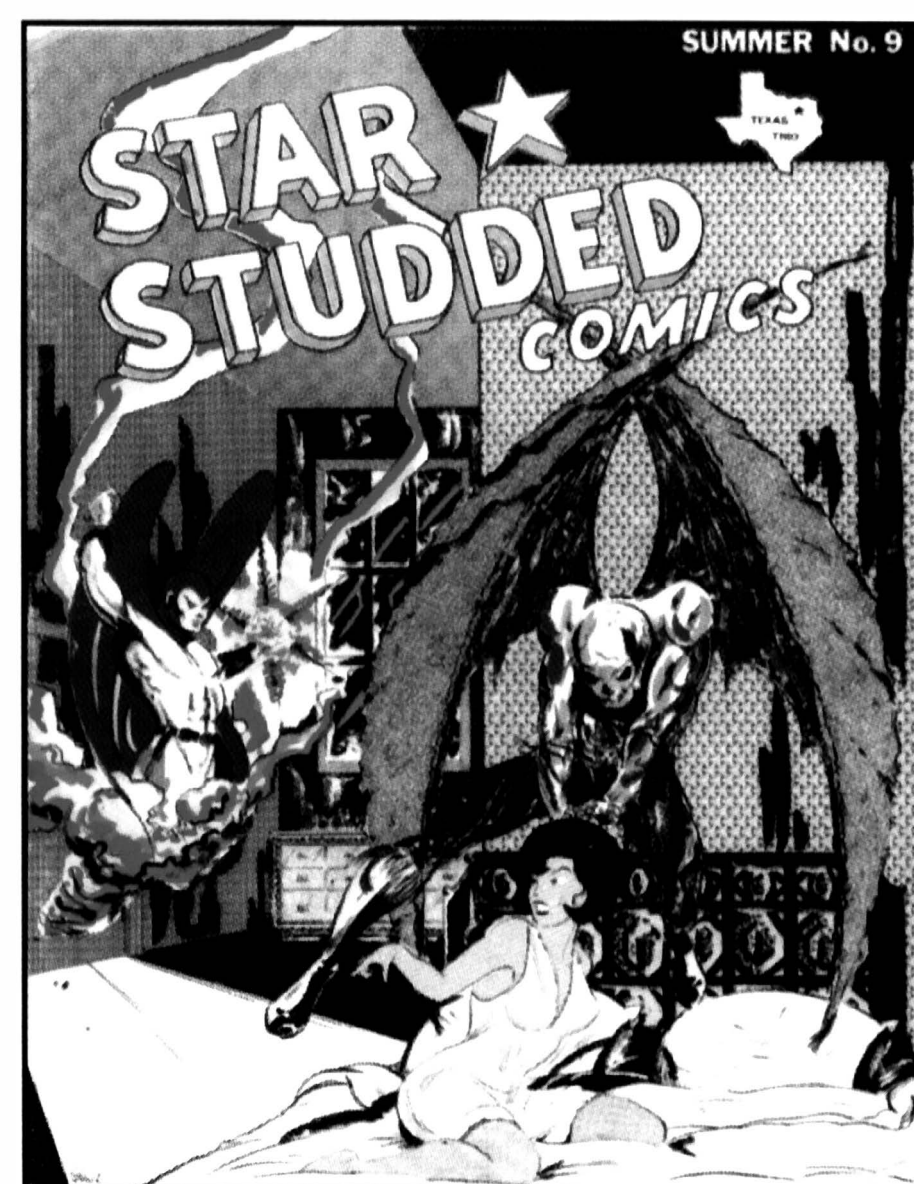
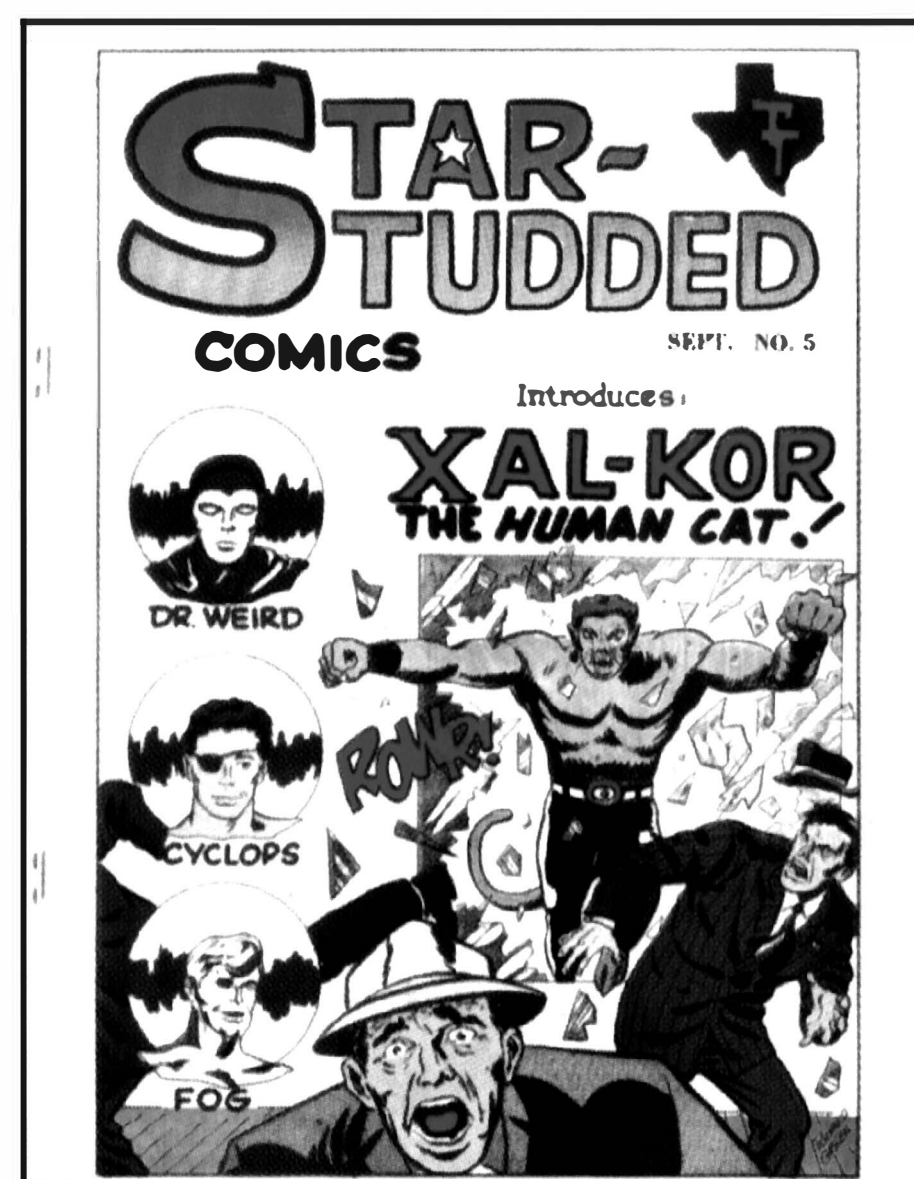
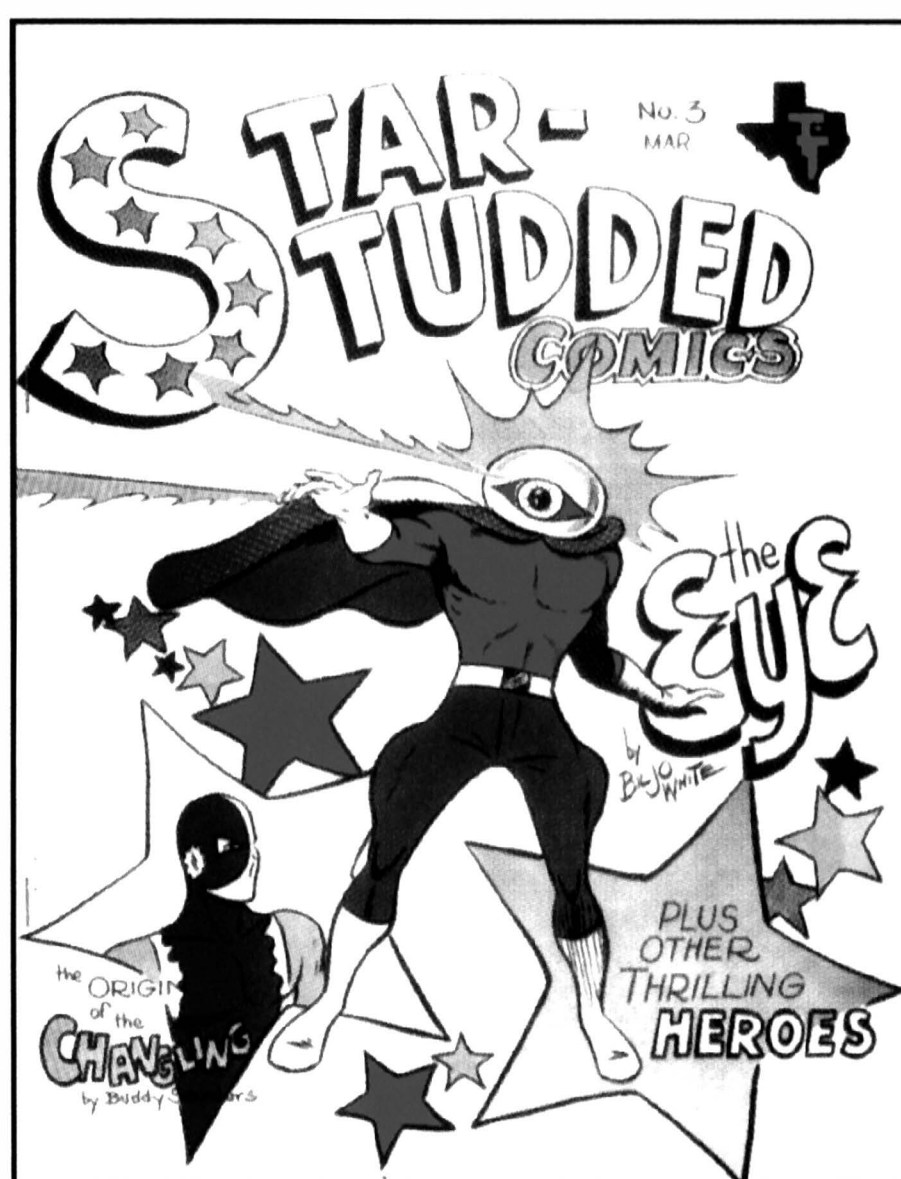
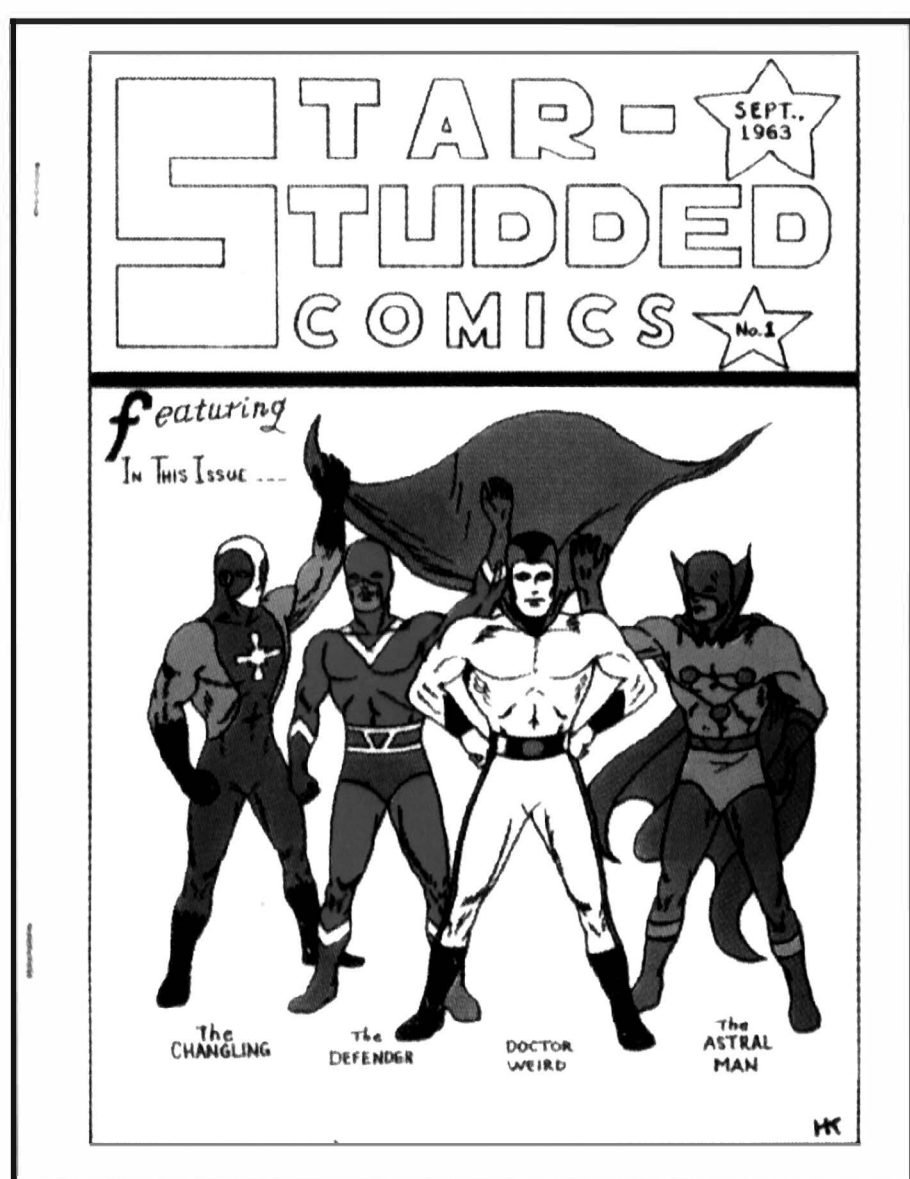
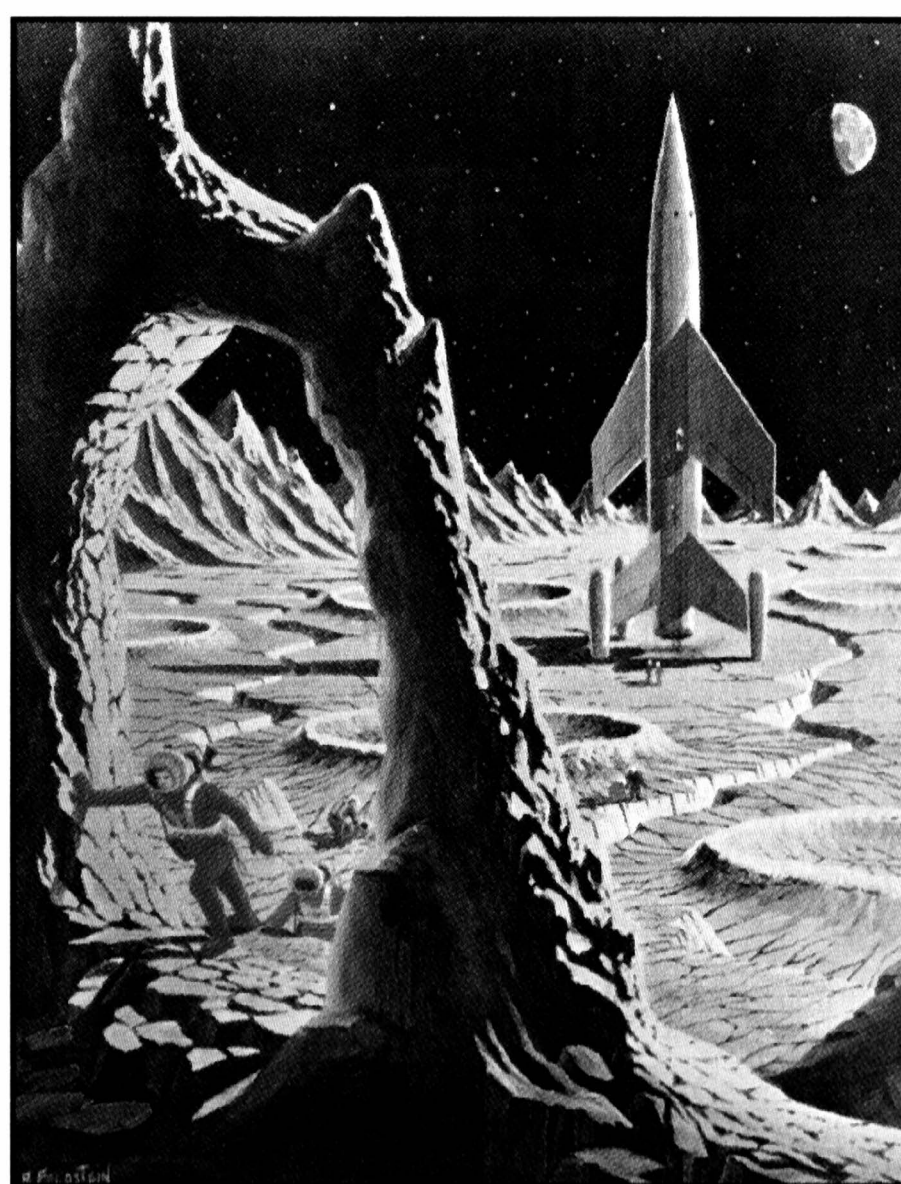
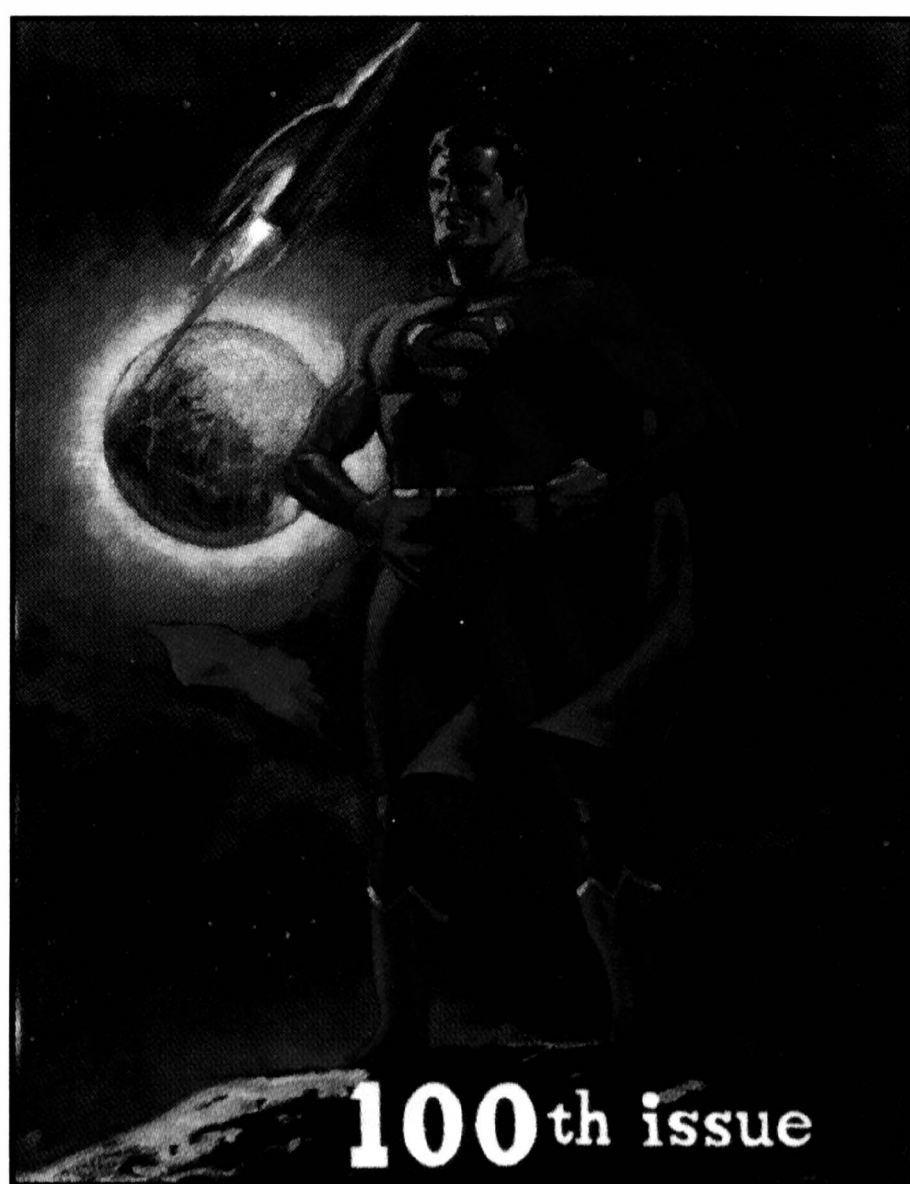
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 Row 2: *Graphic Story Magazine* #13 (1971), D. Bruce Berry; *Graphic Story Magazine* #16 (1974), Howard Nostrand.



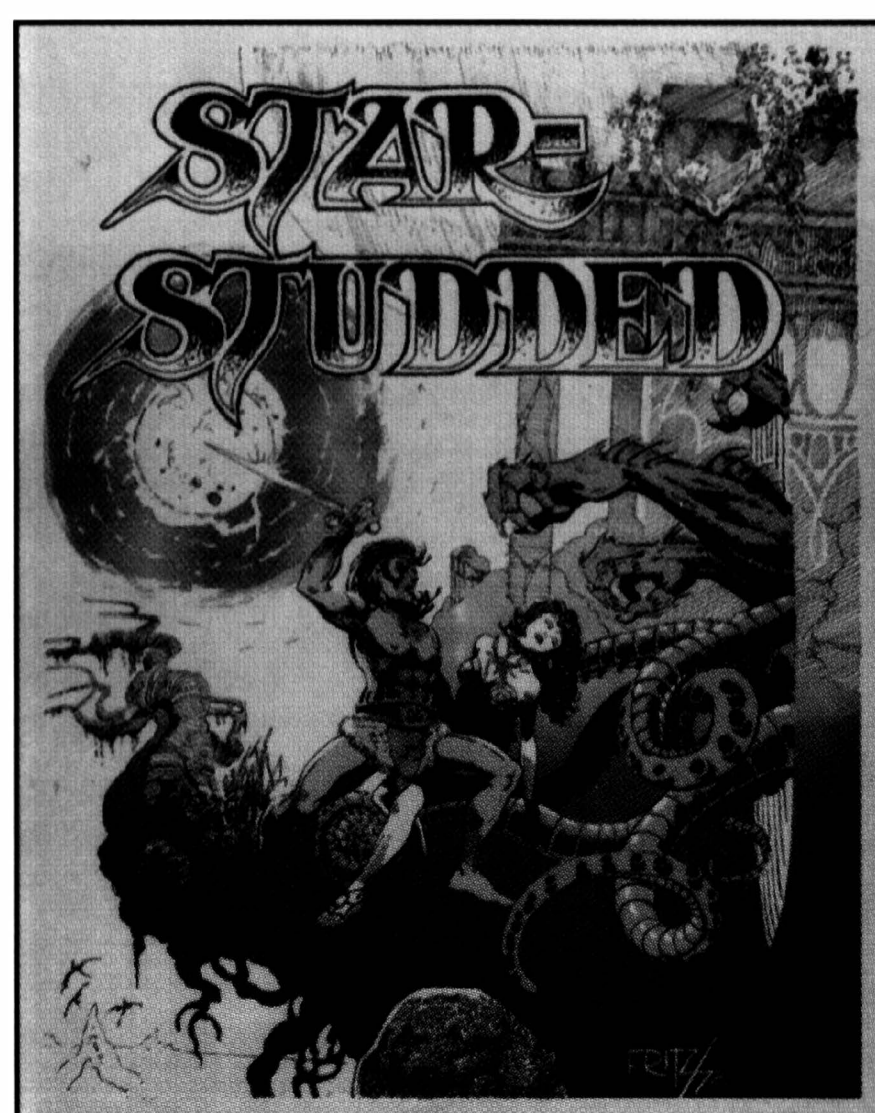
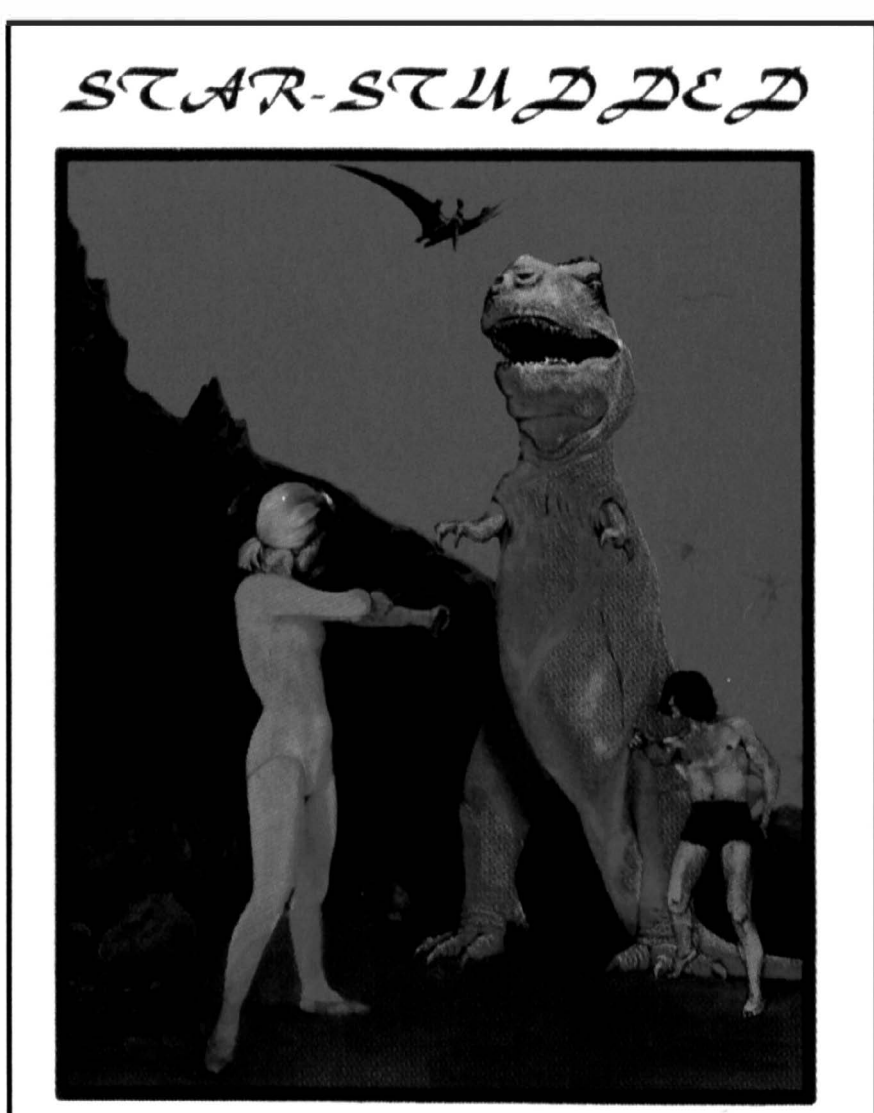
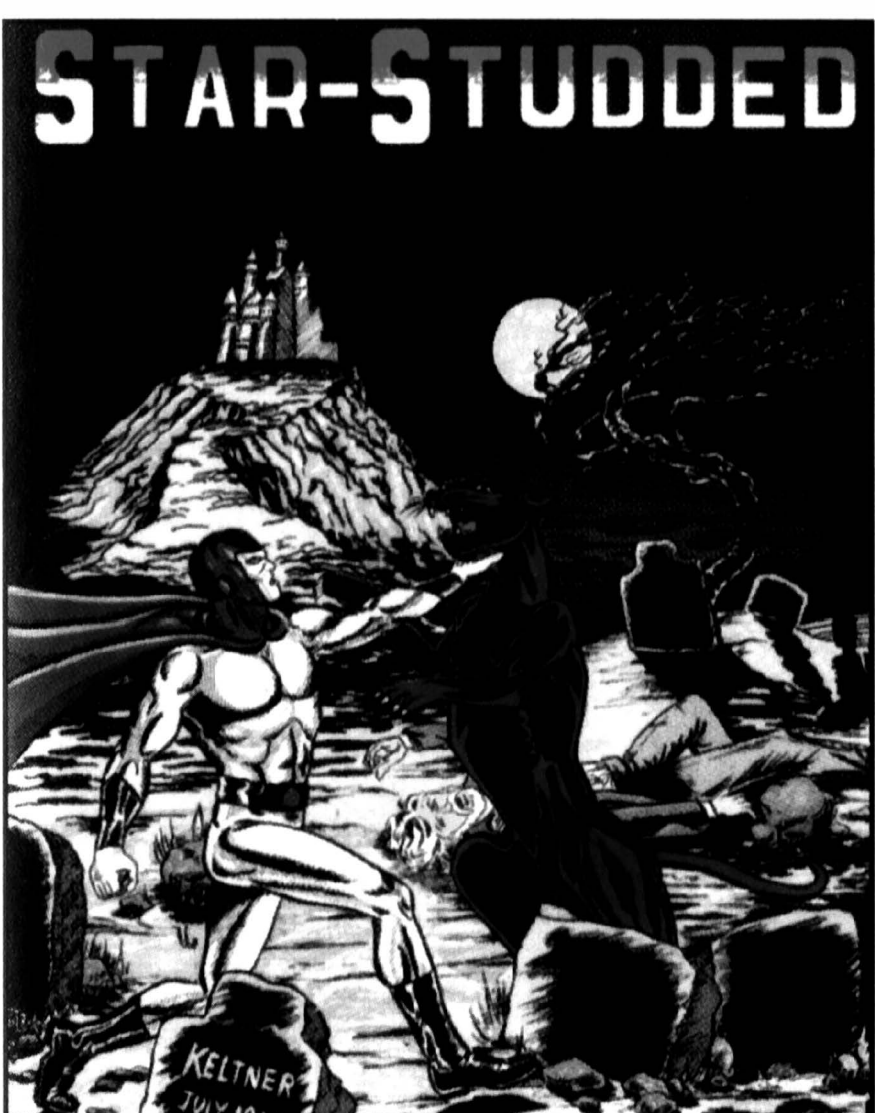
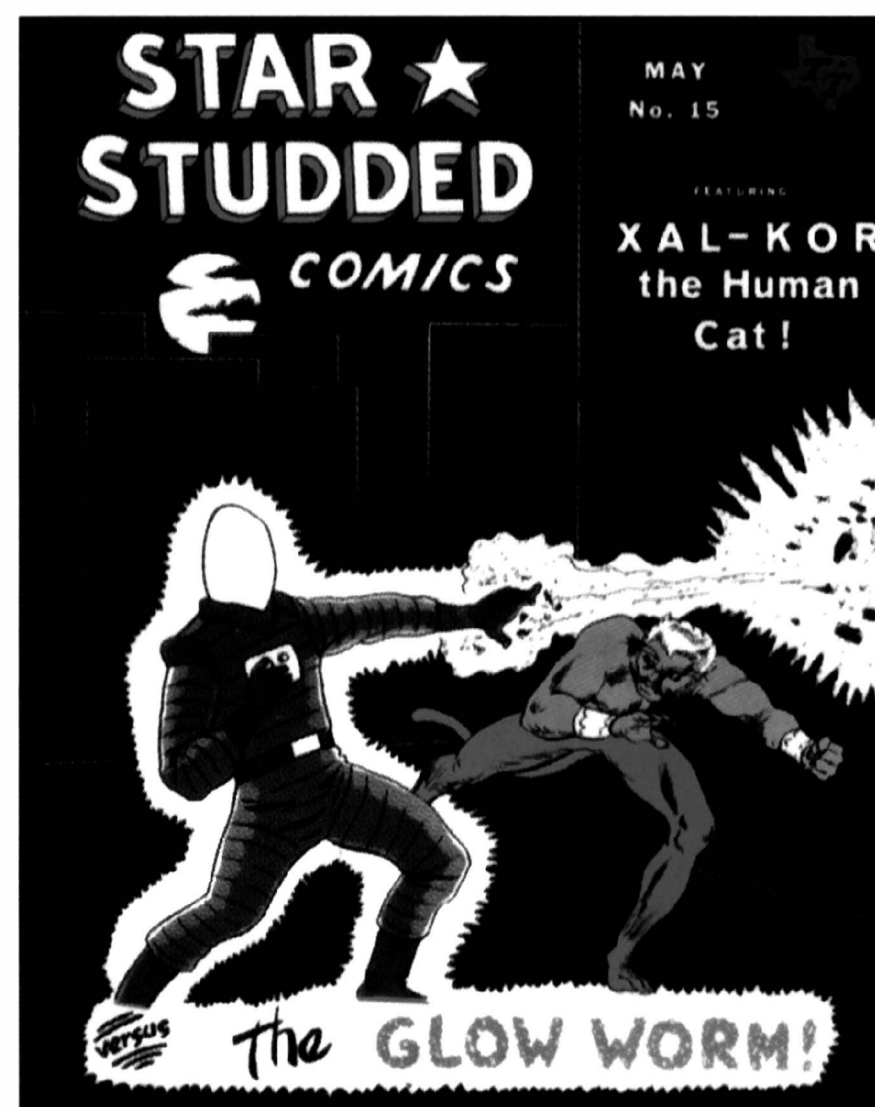
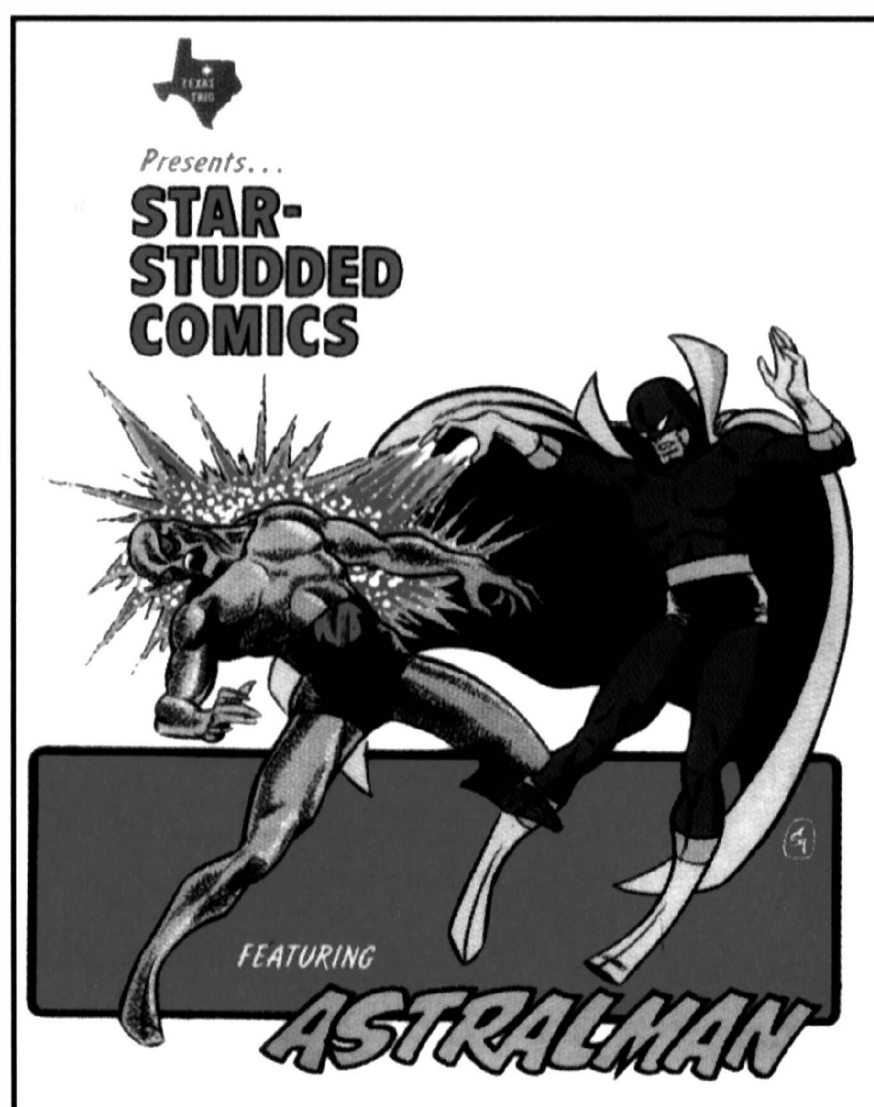
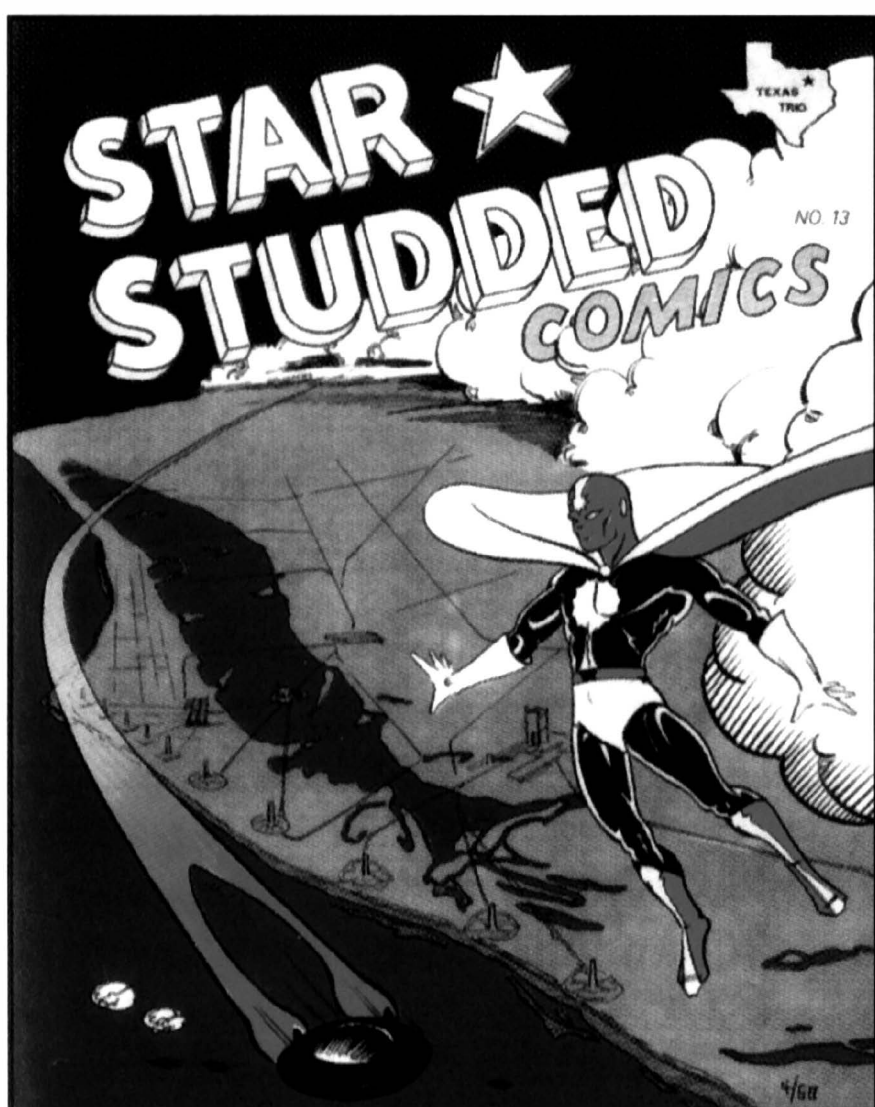
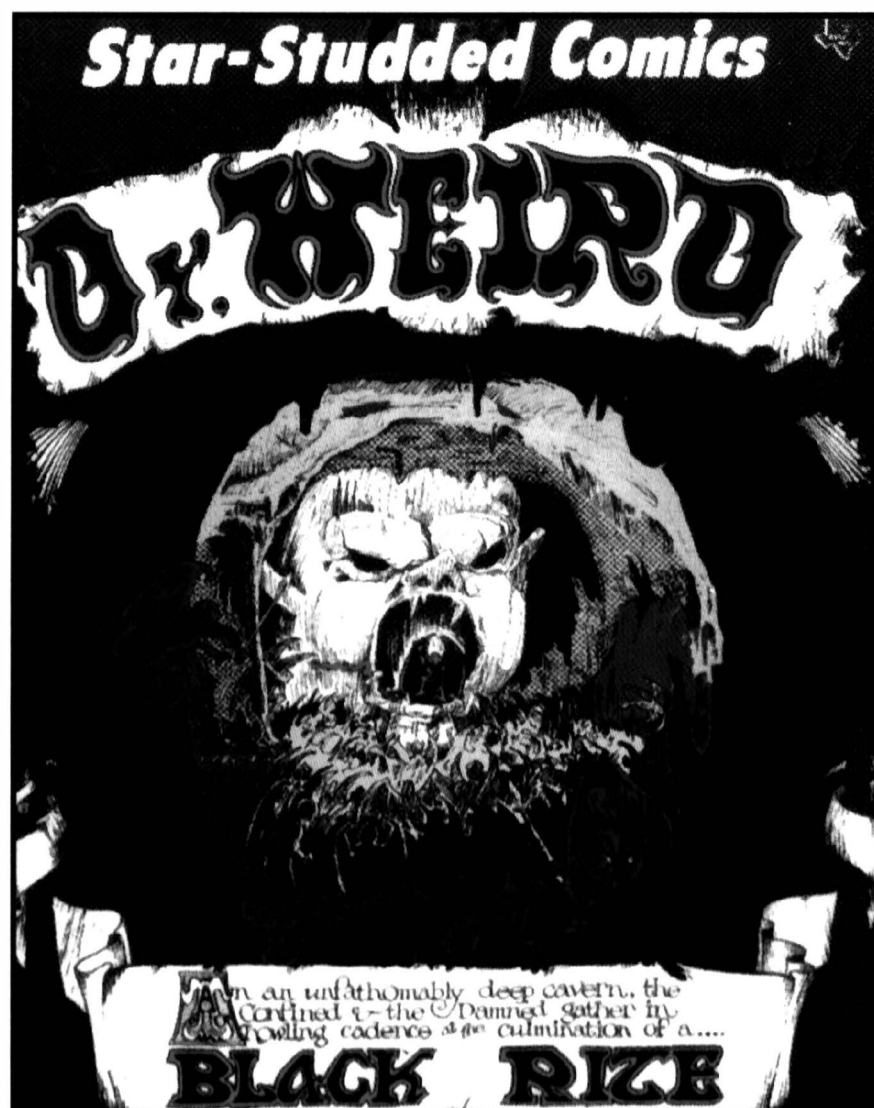
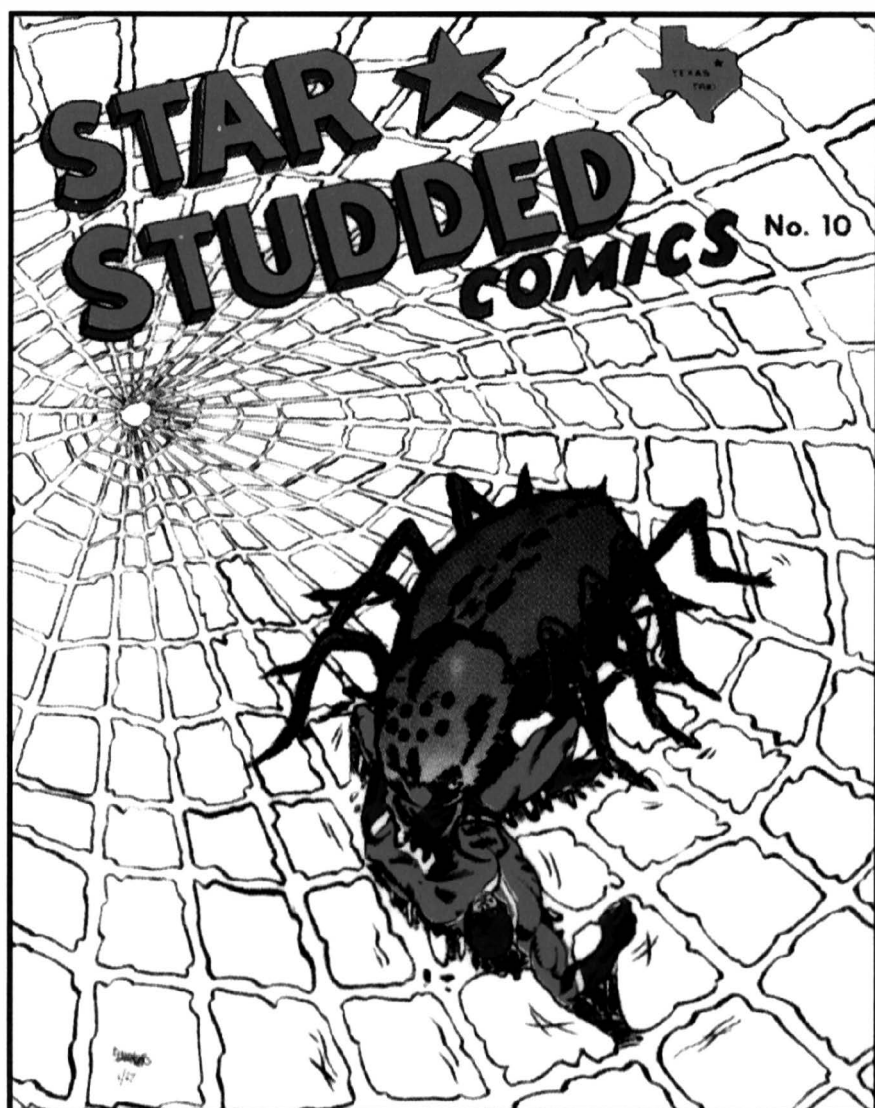
Row 1: *Fighting Hero Comics Special Edition #1* (1967), Buddy Saunders; *Funnyworld #12* (1970), George Metzger; *Funnyworld #14* (1972), Ralph Bakshi. Row 2: *Golden Age #3* (1968), Don Newton; *Gosh Wow! #2* (1968), Vaughn Bode; *The Illustrated Comic Collectors Handbook Vol. 3* (1968), Biljo White. Row 3: *Nucleus #8* (1973), Berni Wrightson; *Phase #1* (1971), Ken Barr; *Rocket's Blast Special #1*, third printing (1967), Buddy Saunders.



Row 1: *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* #57 (1968), John G. Fantucchio; *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* #76 (1970), Don Newton. **Row 2:** *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* #117 (1975), Berni Wrightson, *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* #104 (1973), Don Newton.



Row 1: *Rocket's Blast Comickollector* #100 (1973), Don Newton; *Squa Tront* #3 (1969), Al Feldstein; *Squa Tront* #4 (1970), Graham Ingels. Row 2: *Star-Studded Comics* #1 (1963), Howard Keltner; *Star-Studded Comics* #3 (1964), Biljo White; *Star-Studded Comics* #5 (1964), Grass Green. Row 3: *Star-Studded Comics* #6 (1965), D. Bruce Berry; *Star-Studded Comics* #8 (1966), Grass Green; *Star-Studded Comics* #9 (1966), Buddy Saunders.



Row 1: *Star-Studded Comics* #10 (1967), Buddy Saunders; *Star-Studded Comics* #11 (1967), George Metzger; *Star-Studded Comics* #12 (1967), Grass Green. Row 2: *Star-Studded Comics* #13 (1968), Buddy Saunders; *Star-Studded Comics* #14 (1968), Sam Grainger; *Star-Studded Comics* #15 (1969), Grass Green. Row 3: *Star-Studded Comics* #16 (1969), Howard Keltner; *Star-Studded* #17 (1971), Jerry Mayes; *Star-Studded* #18 (1972), Steve Fritz, last issue.

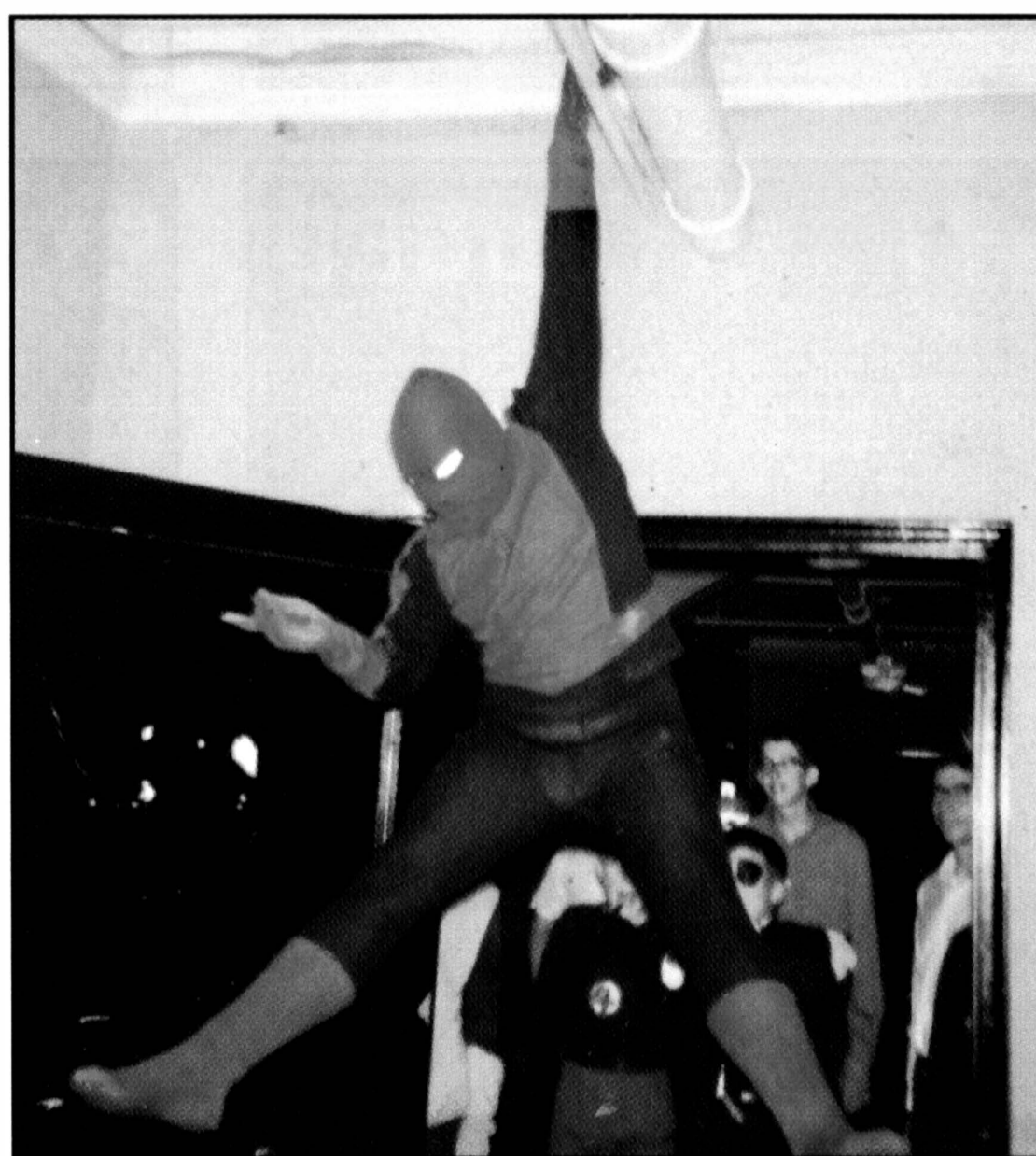
... and, from the early gatherings of comics fans --



Above: Taken at the 1964 Alley Tally Party held at Jerry Bails' home. (Standing) Don Glut, Bob Butts, Larry Raybourne, Dick Andersen, Alex Almaraz, Jerry Bails, Jim Rossow, Keith Greene (holding *Alter Ego* #6). (Kneeling) Ronn Foss (as Rocketman; note rocket tubes and helmet), Mike Tuohey.



Carol and Phil Seuling, as Mary and Capt. Marvel, flank Otto Binder (with his ever-present cigar) at the 1965 New York Comicon. [Photo: Steve Griffin]



"Hey, this place is a dump!" Spider-Man discovers the overhead pipes in the Hotel Broadway Central are filthy, when leaving the masquerade in his inimitable manner. (Note one of the X-Men, Mr. Fantastic and Nick Fury looking on.) [Photo: Steve Griffin]

the issues kept flowing month after month, satisfying the need for pro news, zine reviews and Academy updates.

On January 12, 1966, the Batman TV show hit the airwaves with "Hi Diddle Riddle," which pit the Dynamic Duo against the Riddler. On March 29th, the Broadway musical "It's A Bird ... It's A Plane ... It's Superman" debuted at the Alvin Theatre in New York City. Seeking interesting angles on these comics adaptations, a great deal of media attention was focused on comic fandom.

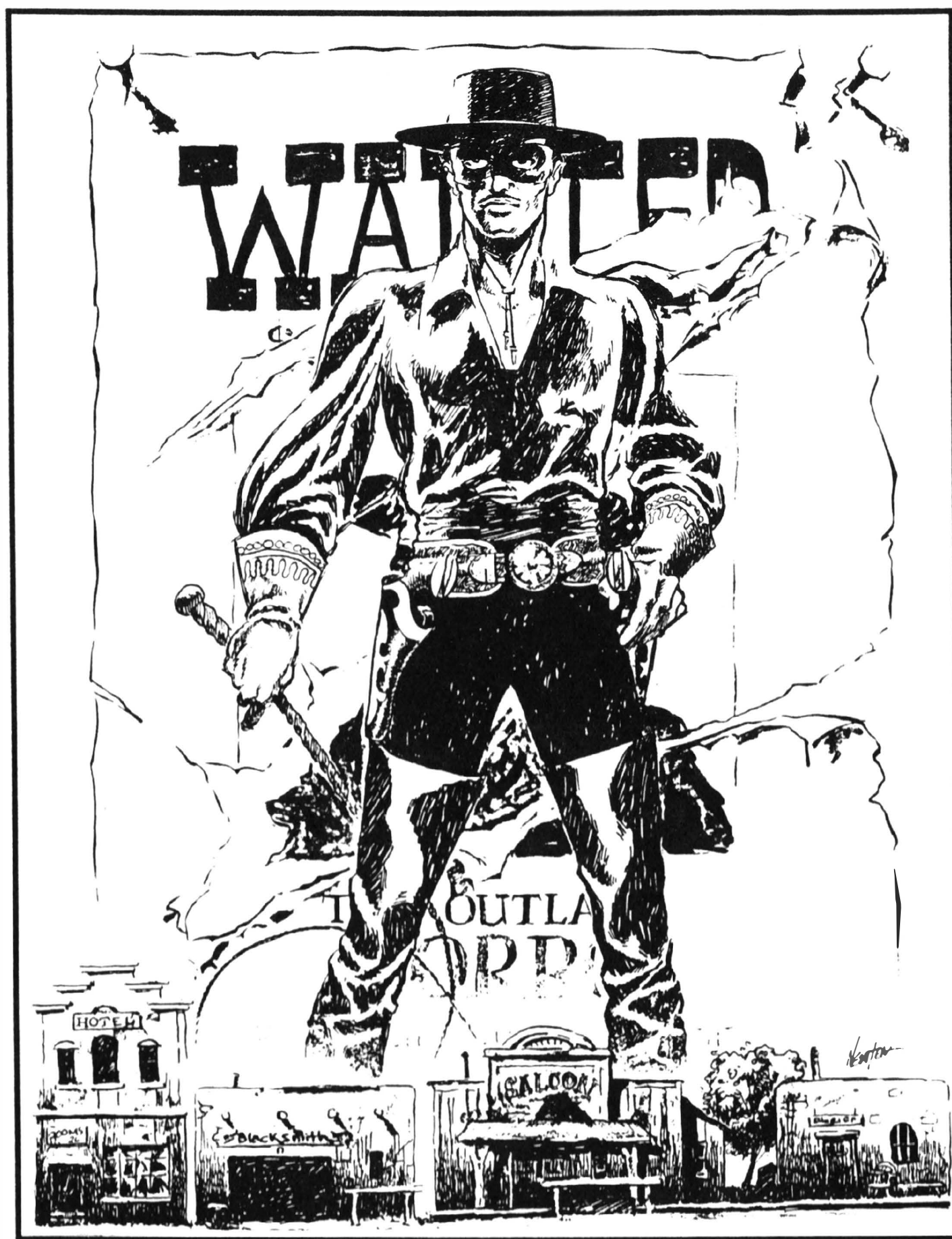
A blizzard of articles on collectors of "those old funny books" appeared in every imaginable magazine or newspaper, often with a headline like: "Holy Greenbacks! Old Comics Worth a Fortune!" The hook of each story was almost always the surprising fact that a collectibles market had sprung up around comic books, and at least certain key issues were selling for what seemed like a lot of money. A whole new breed of investment-minded collector began to make his presence felt. As a result, the economic side of fandom gradually emerged to become a driving force in the future course of comicdom.

Rocket's Blast-Comiccollector was the meeting place for these new collectors, the dealers who served them, and all the others who were interested in the fanzine ads and articles. Its circulation crept closer and closer to 1000, surpassing that benchmark in 1967. (It would peak at 2,500 copies.) More and more fans began dealing comics seriously, and *RB-CC* carried most of their sale lists.

The switch to photo-offset printing by issue #50 (early 1967) relieved G. B. Love of the task of collating and stapling, for he had assembled the ditto and mimeo issues entirely on his own! Although he had the part-time assistance of his close friend Andy Warner, Love continued doing ninety-five percent of the work until 1970, when he hired James Van Hise as his Assistant Editor. (It wasn't just *RB-CC*, either. The SFCA also published *The Golden Age*, the *RB-CC Specials*, *Fighting Hero Comics* and various specials and other mail-order offerings.)

Love was always trying to find ways to enlarge fandom. In 1965, he'd written an Open Letter to fans, asking them to list the addresses of newsstands and stores in their local area that carried comics, so that he could attempt to convince them to sell *RB-CC* right next to the comics. This effort proved to be unsuccessful, but by dint of sheer effort, Love was able to push the envelope further. He was the first person in fandom to advertise in a Marvel comic book on their classified page. His ad was for *The Illustrated Comic Collectors Handbook* and cost about \$350.00, a lot of money at the time. After Jerry Bails, G. B. Love deserves credit for bringing more people into comicdom in the 1960s than any other fan (though the efforts of others in this direction should not be denigrated). At the time, a few grumbled that Love was only interested in increasing the circulation of *RB-CC*, but that automatically led to gains for fandom across the board since virtually every fanzine and fan organization advertised in its pages.

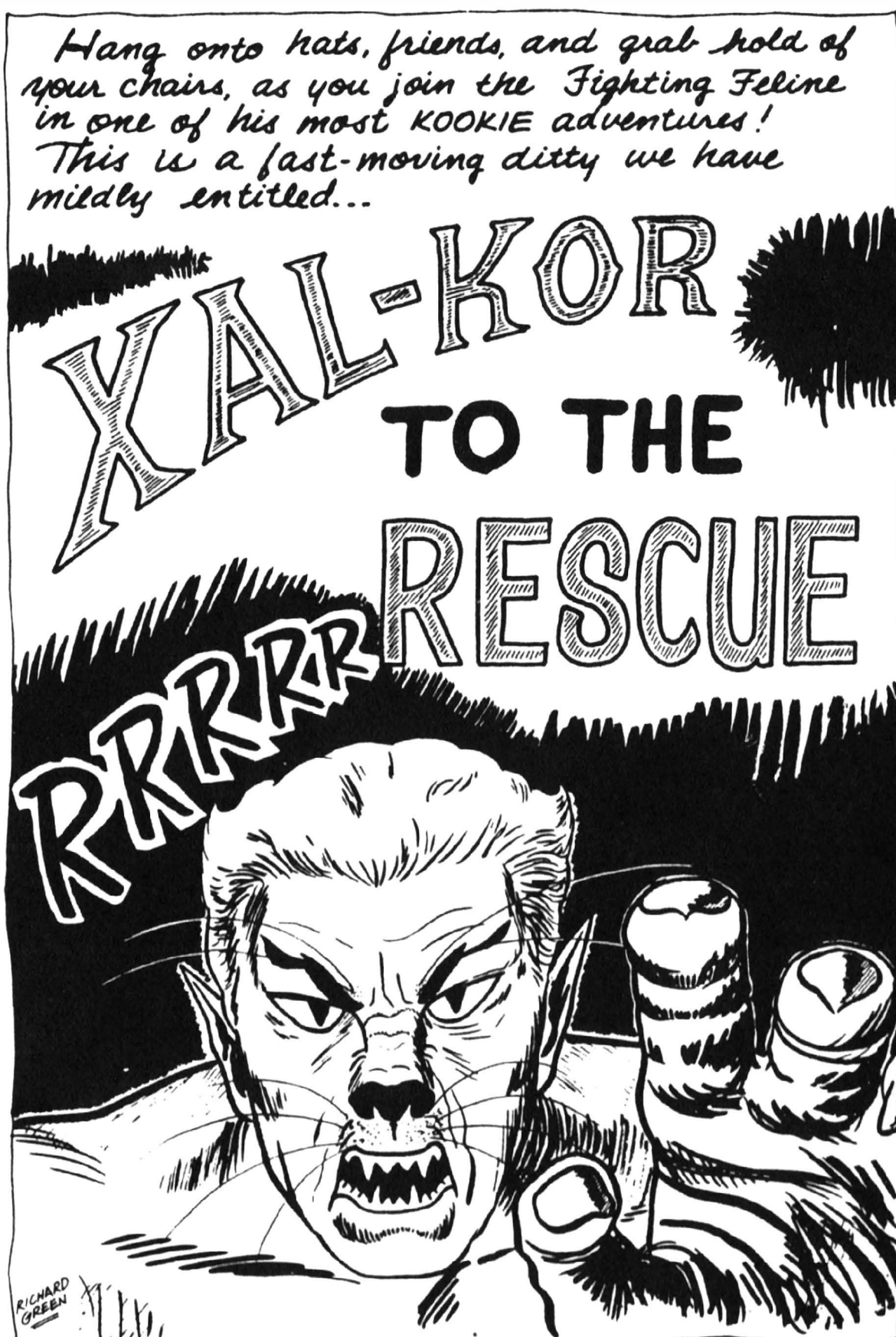
Perhaps as a result of the large circulation, *RB-CC* attracted a staff of some of the most talented cover artists in fandom. By the time the conversion to photo-



Don Newton cover to *RB-CC* #95



John Fantucchio



Above: *Xal-Kor, The Human Cat*, by Grass Green (from *Star-Studded Comics*).

offset printing was complete, dazzling work began to appear by John G. Fantucchio, Don Newton, Berni Wrightson, Steve Fabian, Robert Kline and many others. Newton and Fantucchio, in particular, were mainstays.

John Fantucchio was already an established commercial artist by the time he began sending illos to G. B. Love, having attended an art school in Boston for three years; his work showed an extraordinary sense of design, and a brilliant use of zip-a-tone or BenDay screens. Don Newton's black and white drawings ranked a close second to Fantucchio, but his secret strength lay in his painting ability. His color cover of Flash Gordon and Dale Arden on *RB-CC* #76 (November 1970) is especially gorgeous. (Fantucchio and Newton both did a lot of work for Bill G. Wilson's *The Collector*.) Because of its emphasis on ads, fans don't often mention the quality of the *RB-CC* covers from 1967 onward. Those covers were among the most impressive ever produced during fandom's Golden Age.

As was the practice in comic fandom (adapted from customs in sf fandom), this work was uncompensated. G. B. Love confirms, "Usually I would give the contributors (mostly artists) extra copies of the publication their work appeared in. With Don Newton, who never asked for a thing, I would send him a few dollars because he did so much work for me and was very dependable."

The ads, of course, were the main reason fans subscribed to *RB-CC*. Long-time dealers like Claude Held, Howard Rogofsky and Ken Mitchell were joined

by regular advertisers like Buddy Saunders, Russ Cochran, Gary Dolgoff, Richard Burgess, Mike Nolan, Lucas Dang, Bruce Hamilton, Donald Puff, Dick Hoffman, P. J. Iacovone and Bruce Hershenson. The Grand Book Center and Passaic Book Center were regular advertisers, as were the Cherokee and Collectors Book Stores in Hollywood. In the days before price guides, fans learned about the values of comics by reading the ads in *RB-CC*.

Late in 1970, Robert Bell began advertising bags designed especially to protect comic books, which would forever change the way comic book collectors would protect and store their prized possessions. Comic book bags probably increased the number of high grade comics available from 1970 forward, though conversely they would *accelerate* the decomposition of paper if they weren't regularly changed.²

Articles and ad-zines weren't the whole picture, though. The fanzines ushered in a whole realm of amateur comic strips, a viable alternative to pro comics. Amateur comics varied widely in quality, but the best (either in the slick offset zines, or their modest dittoed cousins) were genuinely popular. Fans paid coin of the realm for them, collected them and traded them. The leader in the super hero field was, without question, *Star-Studded Comics*.

The Texas Trio (Larry Herndon, Howard Keltner and Buddy Saunders) had the production of *SSC* extremely well-organized. Herndon was the Circulation Editor and Head Writer, keeping track of orders, reading letters and writing scripts; Keltner was the Contributions Editor, handling contacts with their staff of writers and artists, and evaluating the work of up-and-coming talents; and Saunders served as Publishing Editor, liaison with the printer, and the one who colored the covers.

Buddy recalled, "It was a real challenge preparing color separations [for four-color offset printing] by crude estimation rather than via any sort of reliable color key. For example, if I wanted a light green, I'd blacken that area on the yellow overlay to get 100% yellow, then use a 20 or 30% screen on the blue overlay, and then hope the resulting green wasn't darker than I wanted. Usually, it turned out pretty close to what I wanted, and I still feel I was a pretty good colorist, especially given the crude system we were forced to work with."

"The thing I most remember about the Texas Trio was the excitement we always experienced on seeing the finished product."

Star-Studded followed up its spectacular Liberty Legion tale in #4 with the introduction of one of the best-remembered and highly regarded amateur characters of the 1960s: Xal-Kor, the Human Cat, by Grass Green. Xal-Kor was a warrior from the planet Felis, who has pursued his rat-like nemesis Queen Roda to earth. Both could disguise themselves as human, or take on the form of a cat or rat, respectively. Xal-Kor's task was to stop the Queen and her minions on earth from launching a surprise attack on his home planet. When he took a job at the Linton Daily News as photographer Colin Chambers, Xal-Kor didn't realize that his co-worker Ann Rhoden was really the nefarious Queen Roda in disguise. Green played out this "cat-and-rat" story with an assurance

HE WAS A LONER--AN OUTCAST IN A WORLD ONE MILLION YEARS AGO! AN ISOLATED, TROPICAL WORLD WHERE TITANIC MONSTERS FROM THE AGE OF REPTILES OVERLAPPED THE DAWNING YEARS OF MAN. HE DESPISED HIS FELLOW MEN, WHILE FOREVER THREATENED IN THE SHADOW OF THE DREADED DINOSAUR! PITTING HIS AWESOME POWERS AGAINST THE TERRORS OF HIS WORLD, HE WAS EARTH'S **FIRST** SUPER-HERO--HE WAS...

MAN-LIZARD!

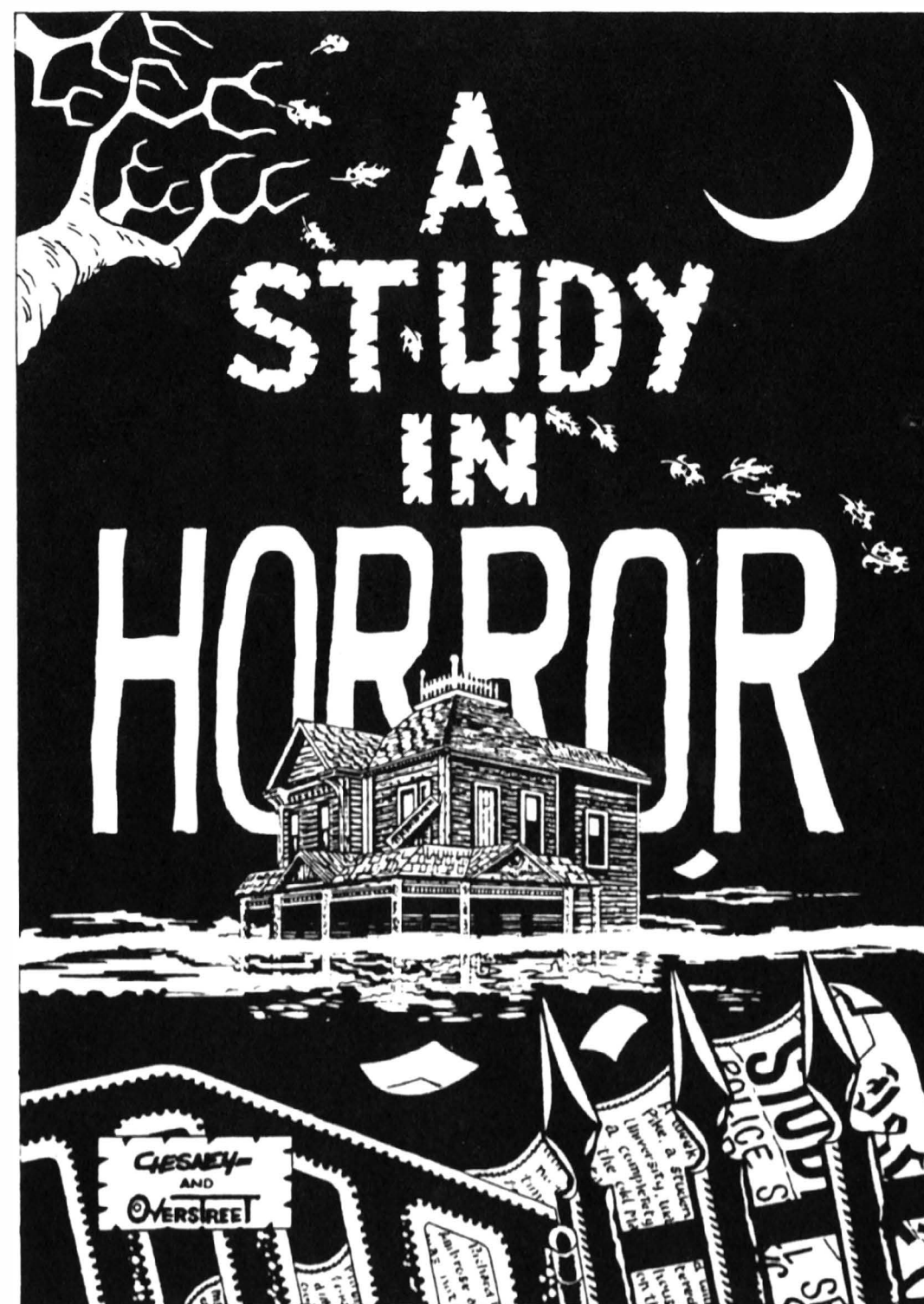
STONE-AGE AVENGER



Jeff Jones' "Man-Lizard!" (Stone-Age Avenger) was slated to appear in Don Glut's aborted *Kapow!*, envisioned as a black-and-white magazine devoted to adventure and super hero strips, in a format similar to *Creepy* and *Eerie*. Other artists on tap were Ronn Foss and Landon Chesney. Unfortunately, the super hero craze in the mid-1960s passed, and the project died. From an article by Glut in *Guts* #5 (Summer 1969.)



ERB enthusiast Harry Habblitz delivered a memorable Tarzan rendition in "The End of Bukawai," an authorized adaptation in *Fantasy Illustrated* #3 (1965).



This spooky Chesney/Overstreet strip also appeared in *Fantasy Illustrated* #3.

and level of technical accomplishment that no other ongoing ama-strip series had attained at that point.³

SSC #7 featured a minor Xal-Kor strip ("Xal-Kor Meets The Coil!"); fans had to wait for SSC #8 (March 1966) for the true follow-up to the origin. "Operation Big Move" is, quite simply, one of the most enjoyable, satisfying strips of its kind—the zenith of the Human Cat saga (though there were other highlights). The Human Cat went on to appear in several subsequent issues of SSC, nearly always topping readers' polls.

Star-Studded wasn't perfect. It was only as good as its contributors, which meant the offerings were uneven; for every zenith like "Operation Big Move" there were two that failed to click. Still, issue after issue, SSC's batting average was higher than its peers.

Meanwhile, Bill Spicer's *Fantasy Illustrated* was still going strong. He had run a stunning adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' story "The End of Bukawai" from *Jungle Tales of*

Tarzan in *FI* #3, which topped the Alley Poll for Best Fan Comic Strip in 1965. This sixteen-pager was beautifully drawn by Harry Habblitz, but a good portion of its success falls on the shoulders of Spicer himself, who not only did the adaptation of the short story, and lettered the strip, but did the panel-by-panel breakdown.

Also in *FI* #3, long-time collector Bob Overstreet teamed up with Landon Chesney (he inked over Chesney's pencils) for a spooky horror piece called "A Study In Horror" set atmospherically in a haunted house; in issue #5, Spicer and Chesney tackled another adaptation, this time Ambrose Bierce's "One Summer Night." Here, Chesney used zip-a-tone shading screens in his artwork, rather than sticking with stark black and white. This was the last "horror strip" that he did for comicdom.

Unexpectedly, "One Summer Night" was framed by three pages of hilarious work, starring Chesney's Misbourne, the gnomish assistant to a miniature man in a cage who draws comic strips,

known as the Master. Reminiscent of Kurtzman and Elder's "Outer Sanctum" in *Mad* #5, Misbourne and the Master was a hit with the readers, who demanded more. Unfortunately, the brief segment in #6 was Chesney's swan song to these amusing characters, and to *Fantasy Illustrated* as well.

Spicer also brought forward a brilliant newcomer: Jeff Jones. In issue #4, Jones wrote and drew "Ku! Primordial," a strip similar in content to Joe Kubert's *Tor*, but in a style more akin to that of Al Williamson. Yet the overall effect, especially in the variety of textures and the panel arrangements, announced the coming of an original new talent. Jones would only complete one more strip for Spicer before he moved into the pages of pro magazines and mainstream fantasy art paintings. That strip was "Alien Autumn," starring Sir John Tyne, set in England in 1455 during the "War of the Roses." It appeared in *FI* #5.

For a change of pace, *Fantasy Illustrated* #4 (Summer 1965) and #6 (Summer/Fall 1966) jumped into the costumed hero arena.



Chesney's off-the-cuff "Misbourne and the Master" captured the appeal of the work of Bill Elder and Harvey Kurtzman. Fans wanted more!

Three of the strips were scripted by one of the most intelligent and prolific writers of amateur comics, Steve Perrin.

Perrin had been involved in fandom from the very beginning, having scripted the third chapter of the first Dimension Man strip. Soon he had invented literally dozens of characters for his own fanzine *Mask & Cape* (which was originated by Margaret Gemignani) and others, such as Beast Master, Dr. Darkness, Capt. Victory and Tele. He was recognized as a superior talent, and much in demand from fan-editors of the early days. Perrin had the knack of orchestrating a script for maximum effect, without the hoary clichés and amateurishness that hampered most scripters in comicdom. It is easy to admire the artistic highlights of the amateur comic strips of fandom's Golden Age, but one should not overlook the fine writing of Perrin and a handful of others.

While Perrin's "Who Is The Mystery Patriot?" boasted some of Buddy Saunders' better inked work, and the Dreamsmen and Lucky in "Saviors from the Future" also benefited from Bill Dubay at his best, it was Perrin's "The Origin of the Black Phantom" in *FI* #6 that made a deep and lasting impression.

The Black Phantom was an African-American costumed hero who was teamed with a white teenage sidekick named Wraith. The "Battler Against Bigotry" first appeared in *Mask & Cape* #4 (Fall 1964) in text form, with a splash page and spot illustrations by Ronn Foss. Bill Dubay had originally been slated to draw the story in full comic-strip form, but when Dubay's father saw the script that his high school-age



Panel from "Alien Autumn" by Jeff Jones, in *Fantasy Illustrated* #5 (1966).



Mike Vosburg

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READ THE FOLLOWING STORIES IN ODD #12,
YOU'LL **NEVER** BE THE SAME AGAIN.....

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MAYBE YOU'VE SEEN OTHER BATMAN SPOOFS, BUT WERE THEY IN OFFSET, ILLUSTRATED BY JIM GARDNER OR WRITTEN BY CALVIN CASTINE & DAVE HERRING?

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WITHOUT REALLY TRYING
ANOTHER WILD PARODY, WRITTEN BY MARY WOLFMAN & ILLUSTRATED BY DAVE HERRING. CRAZY!

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ALL PHOTO-OFFSET!
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OUT SOON, ORDER NOW!
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01760

BEFORE READING ODD #12

AFTER READING FIRST STORY

AFTER READING HALF OF ODD #12

AFTER READING ODD #12

Above: Ad for the final (and best) issue of Steve and Dave Herring's Odd. Only the last issue was printed photo-offset, and featured three great stories.



Wayne Howard



Alan Hanley's "Goodguy"

son was planning to illustrate, he forbade him to be involved in such controversial material. Then Grass Green turned down the project, perhaps feeling self-conscious about the idea (for Grass is black). Finally, Grass' best friend Ronn stepped in and crafted pages that came alive with incendiary imagery and a message of universal brotherhood.⁴

The Black Phantom was the last strip that Ronn Foss drew during his early period of fan activity. In terms of his sheer output (covers, spot illustrations, strips), he was undoubtedly the most prolific fan artist from 1961 through 1964. But in 1965, an event occurred in his life that changed his focus. On October 1, 1965, Ronn married Coreen Casey, an Illinois fan with whom he had carried on a passionate correspondence. The newlyweds moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida (where a brother-in-law had a sign-painting business), and it was there that "The Origin of the Black Phantom" was drawn. The opening bus trip in the strip includes scenes that Foss sketched on their way into the Deep South. From this point forward, Foss largely abandoned the costumed or super hero, as other interests and priorities came to the fore.

Others also credibly jumped into the world of the photo-offset ama-strip zine. Golden Gate Features published *All-Stars* in late 1965, with top drawer material by Ronn Foss ("Belle Starr"), Biljo White ("Origin of the Fog"), Mike Vosburg ("Star Master of Navola 5") and Roger Brand ("The Return of the Green Sorceress starring Blue Bolt"). The cover, based on a scene from Foss' "Belle Starr," was an elaborate piece by Steve Ditko.

Unfortunately (for fandom) *All-Stars* #1 was one of the last fanzines published by the Golden Gate foursome. Marty Arbunich had become interested in the San Francisco music scene in early 1966, and eventually opened a record store and founded two record labels. Bill Dubay married, entered the Army, then moved to New York to work as Art Director for Warren Publications during the 1970s. Rudi Franke continued to publish *Voice of Comicon* on his own.

Steve Kelez and Mickey Schwaberow launched *Magnum Opus*, their own strip-zine, the same year as *All-Stars*. Though Schwaberow showed considerable artistic promise, sales were disappointing and there were no more issues. Bruce Cardozo's *Fandom's Special* #4 (December 1968) carried some superlative work by Dave Herring, an artist most associated with humor strips, plus material from Mike Vosburg and Marv Wolfman. And Bob Schoenfeld's *Gosh Wow!* printed major strips by Ronn Foss, Vaughn Bode and George Metzger starting in 1967.

One of the most unique offset fan magazines was produced by Chicago writer/artist Alan J. Hanley. Later, he wrote: "In 1966 I discovered Fandom through Ross Kight's local *Trading Post* and started work on *Comic Book* #1. I was very starved for creative outlets and fandom was a veritable lifesaver." A few years earlier, he'd created his leading protagonist Goodguy, who was reminiscent of the Fawcett Captain Marvel, and developed an appealing cartoony art style not unlike that of C. C. Beck. Hanley developed a following, and eventually there were six issues of *Comic Book*.



Above: From "The Origin of the Black Phantom" in *Fantasy Illustrated* #6, by the Perrin/Foss team.

Below: Roger Brand's work in *All-Stars* #1 (1965) showed the influence of his idol, Alex Toth.





Odd #12 (1967)

As the decade progressed, it seemed as if new fanzines were sprouting up at every turn. A teenage comic fan would see his or her first fanzine, and instantly become seized with the compulsion to publish. Most, of course, were of marginal quality, but no one could say that they weren't a healthy outlet. Because a lot of these fledgling editors didn't own rare comic books, they couldn't write factual articles; but, they could create their own super heroes and heroines. And that's exactly what they did—in spades!

By far the majority of these publications utilized the ditto printing method. Ditto was especially advantageous for artwork, and the fact that spirit duplication was easy to use and inexpensive meant that a whole slew of novices found a friendly medium for their ama-comics. Hundreds of strips were churned out between 1964 and 1972. Little publishing "empires" were created, with multiple titles, though in truth the contents were virtually interchangeable.

Even if all those dittoed fanzines were readily available today (and they're hard to find, due to low circulations), space does not permit more than an overview of a few of them.

Super-Hero began as a general interest fanzine from editor Mike Tuohey in 1962. Mike had presented some strips, most notably by talented writer/artist Ken Tesar (who signed his work "Kente"). But, when Rich Buckler, another Detroit-area fan, took over as editor/publisher, the emphasis quickly shifted to fan strips. One was an "instant group" of heroes called the Supersix, created and written by Gerry Sorek. Another was a hero named Master Rod. But it was artist Rich Buckler who became the real star.

Like Grass Green before him, Rich was a Kirby admirer of remarkable ability, who assimilated the King's style rather than traced it. He demonstrated the patience and ability to originate action-packed, readable strips. Buckler's talent and energy soon proved too big for just one zine, so he added another called *Intrigue*, to be devoted exclusively to ama-strips. Hugh Surratt, another top artist of the day, inked strips and drew numerous spot illoes for both titles.

No discussion of fan strips could leave out *Odd Magazine*. *Odd* was a ditto humor-zine published by Steve and Dave Herring, starting in 1964. More than any other fanzine that was aimed at comicism, it was modeled after *Mad*—both the EC comic book and the magazine that it became. Each issue of *Odd* had parodies of comic strips and, sometimes, popular movies or TV shows.

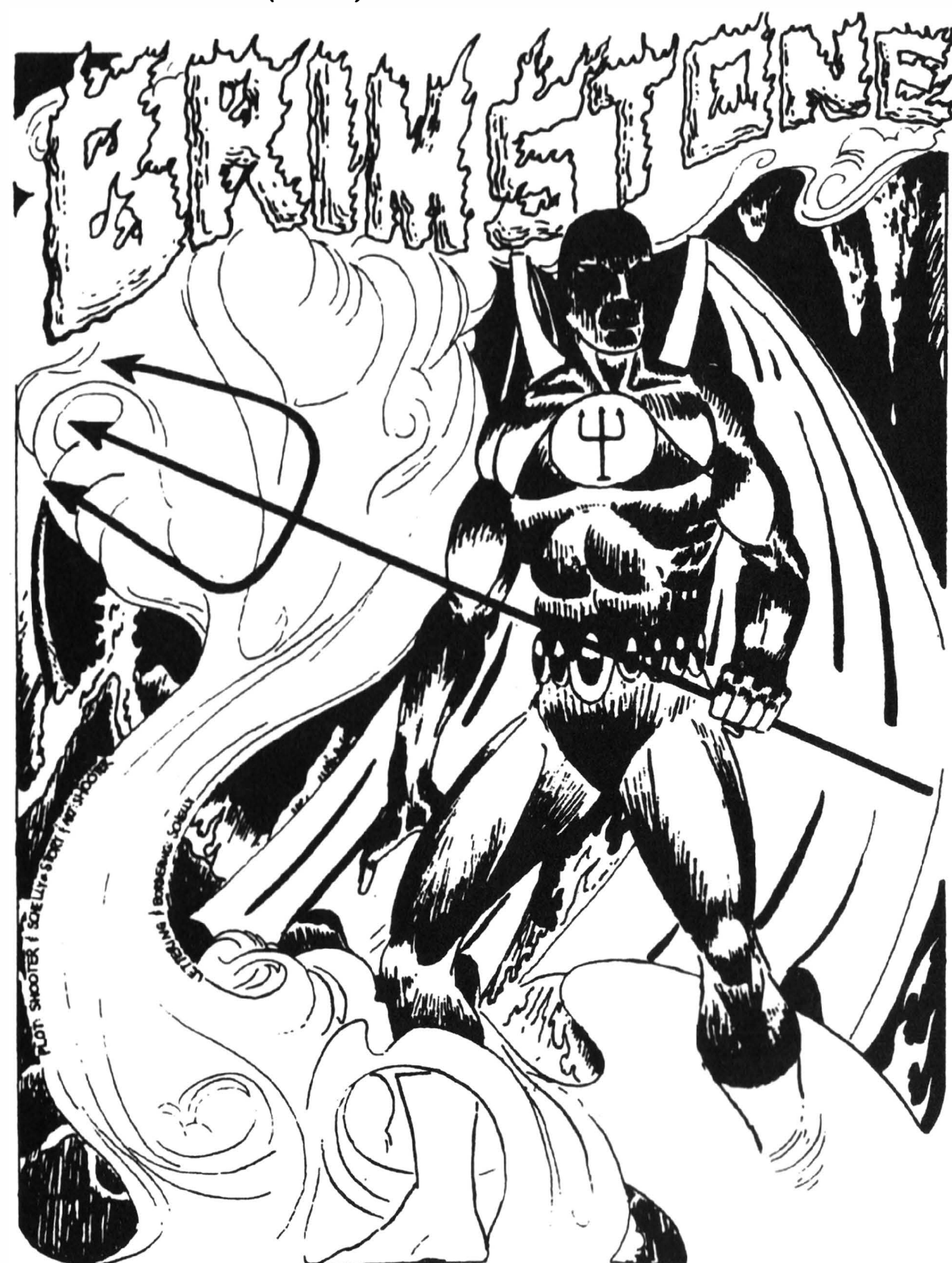
One thing that *Odd* especially had going for it was Dave Herring's art. While Steve was a good writer, brother Dave's ability to draw neat, attractive images on a ditto master was superior to most other fan artists. He was meticulous with shading plates and nearly always enhanced the standard purple with green and red.

The stand-out issue was the last, an all-offset digest-sized *Odd* #12 (1967). It began with "Ratman and Rodent," a parody of the Batman TV show with a script by Calvin Castine (of *Sick* magazine) and Dave Herring, and art by Jim Gardner. Regular *Odd* writer Marv Wolfman contributed a hilarious "Lost In Space" send-up ("How To Get Lost in Space Without Really Trying") with great Herring art using Craftint shading. Then, with "The Count," Steve and Dave did



Above: Rich Buckler's Kirby-esque cover to Tony Rutherford's Bombshell Ama-zine #7.

Below: Jim Shooter and Yours Truly teamed-up to create Brimstone, whose origin appeared in Sense of Wonder #4 (1968).





SENSE OF WONDER
SENSE OF WONDER
SENSE OF WONDER
SENSE OF WONDER
SEVEN

Sense of Wonder #7 (1969) cover by Fantucchio

an uncanny Kurtzman/Elder pastiche based on the home life of Dracula. For their swan song, the Herrings pulled out all the stops and produced the funniest issue of the run.

Action Hero had been a minor zine co-produced by Chic and Bill Dubay until it was taken over by Sherman and Wayne Howard of Cleveland, Ohio, with issue #3. The Howards, two of the few black creators active in comicdom, turned *Action Hero* into a solid, individualistic ditto fanzine. Although they had contributions by fans like Larry Herndon, Steve Perrin, Bill Dubay and Ronn Foss, they chose to do the majority of the creative work themselves. *AH*

had an original look to it. Sherman Howard was a skilled writer, and Wayne possessed a workman-like art ability. (Wayne Howard eventually found employment as an assistant to Wally Wood, drew dozens of strips for the Charlton ghost comics of the 1970s, and even did a bit of work for Marvel.)

Another amateur magazine that made a place for itself in the ranks of comicdom, beginning in 1967, was *Sense of Wonder*.⁵ I had entered fandom in 1964, and began publishing in February 1965 with a crude first attempt called *Super-Heroes Anonymous*; with *Sense of Wonder*, I was determined to move into the ranks

of the better zines, with only top quality features. In the next several years, I published strips by Joseph Wehrle Jr., Alan Hanley, Mickey Schwaberow, Sherman Howard, and Ronn Foss. My most ambitious comic strip was *The Assembled Man*, a 58-page epic stretching over three issues, which was essentially a modern-day adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. There were also pieces by various pros, including a Mr. A strip by Steve Ditko. The later issues published one of the first extensive articles on Will Eisner's career, in two parts, written by Raymond Miller, Thomas F. Fisher and John T. Ryan.⁶ The fanzine's covers were drawn by John Fantucchio, D. Bruce Berry, Alan Hutchinson and other top talents.

Sense of Wonder published several prose tales of my best known fan creation, *The Immortal Corpse*. These pulp-oriented tales (often written by my friend and mentor, Dick Trageser) invariably built toward the moment when the Corpse terrified his quarry by mentally aging himself into a rotting mummy with claw-like talons and vowing to "take those who would prey on society to their grave." Others tried their hand at tales of the pulp-inspired character, such as Larry Herndon of *Star-Studded Comics* renown.

In 1967, I discovered that Jim Shooter lived in nearby suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Though he was busy with constant pro assignments from Mort Weisinger at DC, Shooter nevertheless found time to do several art pieces for *Sense of Wonder*, and to collaborate with me on the creation of a character named Brimstone, which appeared in *SofW* #4. Jim not only wrote the script, he provided the first two pages of finished inked artwork. (I did the remainder of the art.) It isn't well known that Shooter was an excellent artist, as well as writer.

And then came *Bombshell*.

Each issue of Tony Rutherford's fanzine was crammed with strips, illos and text stories by the "upwardly mobile" in comicdom—generally the younger set, who were just beginning to hone their craft. At first *Bombshell* was a

crud-zine, pure and simple, but it gradually improved. It's huge staff of contributors included Steve Fritz, Bob Feie, Ric Morgan, Gary Povlin, Chuck Rogers, Mike Benton, Chuck Robinson II, Bob Cosgrove, Doug Potter, Hugh Surratt, Steve Rasnic, Allen Logan and others. One of the more memorable efforts was "The Champions of Freedom," (#8, July 1967), a strip penciled by Richard Buckler and "inked" (on ditto masters) by Jeff Gelb, Dick Mosso and an uncredited Marshall Lanz.

While fans derided and mocked the Comics Code Authority, most of the earlier strips that could easily have passed the CCA. It's true that the standards of what was considered "good taste" were different then, and change *would* come to fandom (as it felt the effect of the 1960s counter culture), yet it is odd (if only in retrospect) how generally respectful fan writers and artists were of the accepted norms in comics. Though free of any external restrictions (except, possibly, postal regulations), fans generally displayed a rather conservative bent. Not that there wasn't a gentle pushing against the wholesome image of post-Code comics. Horror strips might portray vampires, but the imagery was far from shocking; epithets rarely exceeded an occasional "damn" or "hell;" the portrayal of violence was tame compared to today's norm; and sexual content didn't stray much beyond ample cleavage. Fanzines *were* sold to many younger teenagers, and editors generally kept this in mind. It wasn't until late in the decade before female nudity gained acceptance in the fan press.

In 1966 and 1968, respectively, the last two issues of Don and Maggie Thompson's *Comic Art* were published. Each issue had gotten thicker than the last, following a similar pattern as *Xero*. #6 presented articles on Caniff, Pogo and Jerry De Fuccio, plus the usual letters and such. #7 weighed in at a whopping seventy-six pages, over half of them devoted to various pieces about Carl Barks, by Malcolm Willits, Michael Barrier and Barks himself.

In late 1957, Willits had written to Disney and obtained the name of the "good duck artist." That began a correspondence with Barks, and the first ever Barks interview. At first, Barks thought Willits' fan letter was a hoax from a co-worker, for he couldn't believe anyone would take his work so seriously. (Don and Maggie discovered Barks' identity separately, in response to their query of Dell.) The articles in *Comic Art* in 1968 introduced Barks to many comics fans who had never heard of him, and offered new areas of exploration and enjoyment to those who were getting a little tired of super heroes. From this point forward, Barks fandom grew in leaps and bounds.

Comic Art #7 also included fiction by Harlan Ellison, among other assorted items. There was no announcement of discontinuation; in fact, a next issue was promised. But another issue did not materialize, and comicdom was poorer for it. *Comic Art* had provided a unique forum for intelligent interaction between sf fandom and comicdom, and it was missed. Not that Don and Maggie had left fandom—far from it. They had two other major ongoing projects to keep them busy.

First was their Central Mailer position for *Capa-alpha*, which they had assumed when Jerry Bails

rather abruptly announced in *K-a* #20 (May 1966) that he was resigning as CM, thus suspending the apa. With no plan of succession in place, the Thompsons gamely picked up the ball, assuming the responsibility for keeping the amateur press association going.

They had another publication, too—a little newsletter called *Newfangles*, that was devoted to keeping fans informed about the news in *fans'* lives. It was published more or less monthly, and would eventually inspire another fan to begin a monthly publication of his own. That fan was Alan Light.

Footnotes - Chapter 8

¹Rick Weingroff, "Editorial," *Slam-Bang* #1, April 1964.

²Manufacture of sealed polyester bags which don't decompose (commonly known as Mylar bags) was pioneered by Ernst Gerber in 1979.

³The first three Human Cat comic strips were re-drawn by Green and various inkers for *Xal-Kor*, *The Human Cat* #1, New Media Irjax, August 1980.

⁴Steve Perrin wrote a second Black Phantom script, "Death Trap In Harlem," for which Spicer did breakdowns, but it was never illustrated.

⁵Forgive me if I seem immodest by including an account of my own fanzine. I do feel it's appropriate to include *Sense of Wonder* in this history, because of the number of amateur strips it included, its circulation (a total of over 4,000 copies were distributed) and its staying power, lasting more than five years.

⁶Raymond Miller and Thomas F. Fisher, "Will Eisner: A Man and His Work," *Sense of Wonder* #11, Spring 1972; John T. Ryan, "Will Eisner & Co.," *Sense of Wonder* #12, Summer 1972.



9

Regional Fan Scenes

Comic fandom had grown from its humble origins to become a significant cultural phenomenon by the mid-1960s. Fanzines were providing an increasing amount of research about comics of the past. More and more vintage comic books were becoming available through a variety of outlets, from used book stores to mail order dealers to comic book conventions.

Fan activity was especially notable in certain hubs, generally in the major urban areas. Enthusiasts naturally found ways to congregate where they were more plentiful. Groups of comic-collecting buddies would link up by word-of-mouth, through the comics letter columns, or through addresses published in the fanzines. Usually a few of these hobbyists were of an organizing bent, and began planning special events designed to attract collectors from nearby areas, and also local pros. Thus, certain regions became focal points for fan activity and the propagation of comicdom.

Some have posited that the Midwestern states, in a rough triangle between Michigan, Ohio and Missouri, could be considered "the cradle of comic fandom." If so, Detroit stands out as an early site for ground-breaking events, from the birth of *Alter Ego* (and its progeny) to the emergence of the Detroit Triple Fan Fair.

By rivaling New York City as the site of the long-awaited

"national comicon," the Triple Fan Fair became the comicon-of-choice for many in the Midwest and central United States. "It was a real hot spot," Greg Theakston recalled in a recent interview, "because Bails and Dorf had galvanized fandom in the area."

After 1965, the Michigan Science Fiction Society (known as the Misfits) had a big involvement with the convention. They held



Rich Buckler and Jerry Bails (1970)

their annual banquet and awards ceremony at the Triple Fan Fair through 1969. Theakston related, "Jerry Bails was part of that, of course... Howard DeVore, Marv Giles and Edwin Aprill Jr. were some of the key members. My first Detroit con was 1968, when Harlan Ellison was the guest of honor." By 1968, the Fan Fair attendance had swelled to perhaps 700 fans of movies, comics and science fiction.

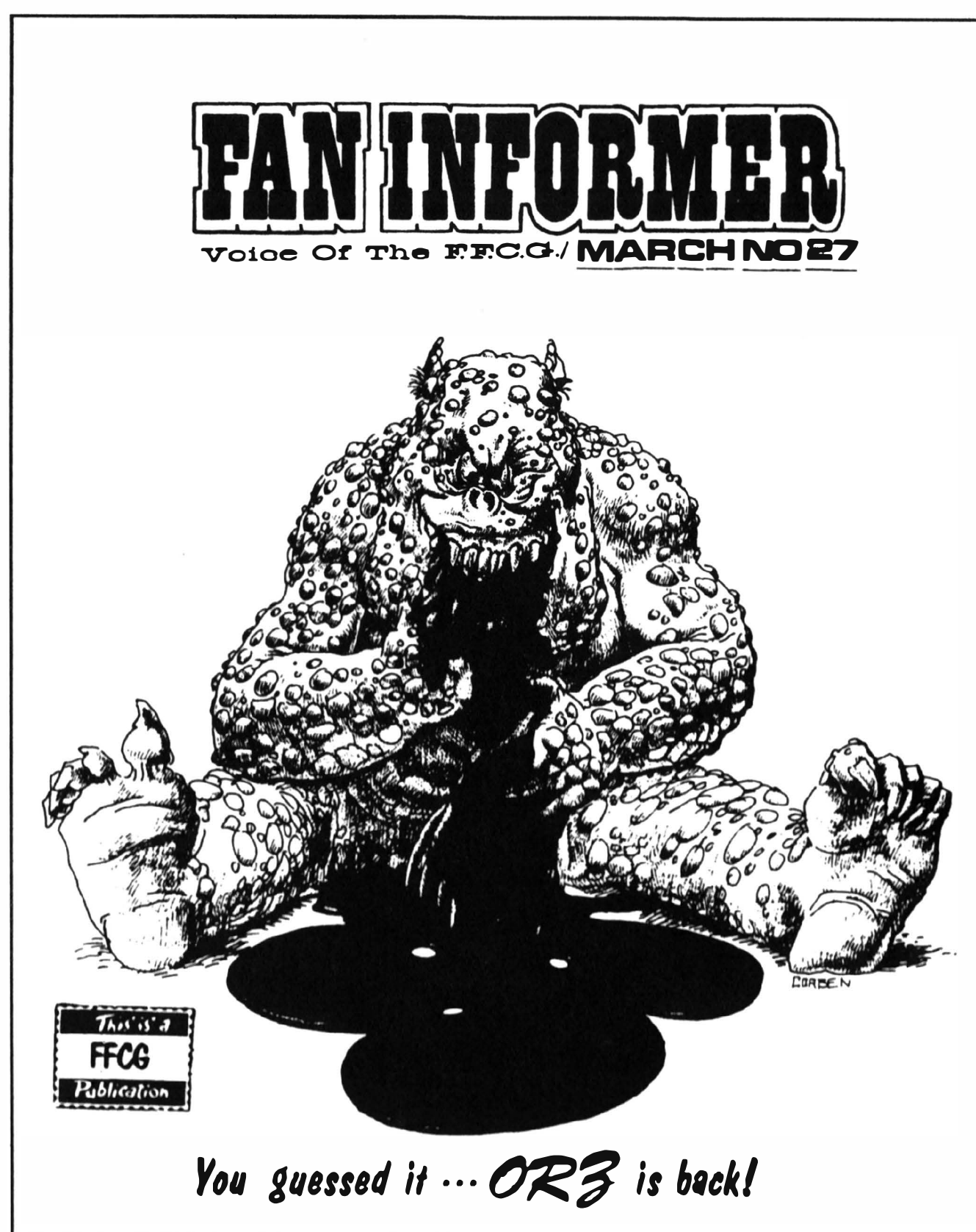
After 1969, the Misfits decided to drop out. Shel Dorf had moved out of town. Due to their earlier involvement in the publications and film program, Rich Buckler and Robert Brosch became their successors at the helm of the Detroit Triple Fan Fair. Their first "solo year" was 1970, the year Theakston began his official involvement with the con.

"Since so many of the Detroit comic collectors were also film collectors, they would bring their collections of sixteen millimeter films to the con, and we had a series of film shows in the early 1970s that were superior to any other convention," Greg asserted. They showed the James Bond films, *2001*, the Dirty Harry movies, *King Kong*. "We had an enormous ballroom several years running and would put up a screen the entire length of the ballroom." Although Detroit couldn't compete with New York for comics professionals, they did have Al Williamson as their guest in 1969, and Jim Steranko in 1970. The DTFF debuted Steranko's paperback art and his *History of Comics Vol. I*. That same year, Bernie Wrightson and Frank Brunner were guests of the con. After 1970, they expanded from two to three-day shows.

A group called the Fantasy Fans-Comicollectors Group (FFCG) was formed in the late 1960s. The "voice" of the FFCG was *Fan Informer*, published by Arvell M. Jones and Tom Orzechowski. This newsletter proved to have staying power, lasting for several years as the source of both national and regional news. Other staffers were Greg Theakston and Joe Wesson, with art provided by Rich Buckler, Dan Adkins, Richard Corben among many others. During its run, Buckler moved to New York City to accept pro assignments, and became a link to the Big Apple for the Detroit community. Other Detroiters who would find success in professional comics were Jim Starlin, Al Milgrom and Mike Vosburg.

The Detroit group were innovators. They had the first big Star Trek-themed convention, bringing the creators and actors of the TV show to town. They were the first convention in America to have Ray Harryhausen as a guest. "I started as an assistant, and by 1974 I owned the Detroit Triple Fan Fair," Theakston concluded. "After 1977, I left to pursue my own art career, but I have only great memories of those conventions and the fans in Detroit."

As we have already seen, fans from the Lone Star State had been active in fandom almost from the start. Howard Keltner had been one of the original twenty members of the Academy of Comic Book Arts and Sciences (as it was originally known), Buddy Saunders began publishing *The Comic Fan* in 1962, and L. L. Simpson was contributing to *Alter-Ego* that same year. When Larry Herndon invited Keltner and Saunders for a visit at his home in Carrollton, Texas in early 1963, *Star-Studded Comics* was conceived. Through



Above: Richard Corben did the cover to *Fan Informer* #27 (March 1971), the official organ of the Fantasy Fans-Comicollectors Group in Detroit.

Below: Rick Norwood and Paul McSpadden haggle over a trade at the first Southwestern Con in 1966. (This photo originally appeared in *Star-Studded Comics* #10, 1967.)





Earl Blair, Ken Finnerty, Marc Schooley and Roy Bonario, from a well-worn 30-year-old photograph kept in Bonario's wallet in the intervening years.

1964 and 1965, SSC was the most visible fanzine to come out of Texas, and a rallying point for the region. Certainly the Texas Trio's mailing list would be a valuable tool when upcoming fan events were planned.

Next, fan activity in Houston began heating up. Roy Bonario wrote, "In 1965 at age 30, I owned a phonograph record shop near a high school in southeast Houston. One day, a high school student, David Eddings, introduced me to comics fandom. He overheard me talking about Captain Marvel, and informed me that he had some comics with the Big Red Cheese. The next day he not only brought in Captain Marvel comic books to my shop, but a copy of the *RB-CC* and a list from Howard Rogofsky. I was completely hooked.

"I shared this interest with my close friend, Marc Schooley," Bonario continued. "After seeking out old comics from magazine exchanges, used book stores and *RB-CC*, we decided in early 1966 to see if we could find others in town who shared our interest. Having read an article in one of the local newspapers about Gene Arnold, a radio newsman who collected old comic books, we decided to start with him. After recruiting Gene, and used book store owner Fred Van Cleave, we compiled a list of about a hundred comic book fans."

Bonario and Schooley set up their first meeting in June at the Houston YMCA and were astonished when almost sixty comics fans showed up. "They were between the ages of twenty and forty-five," Roy recalled. "One of them was now renown writer Larry McMurtry who collected Fiction House comics." That meeting was a big success, although membership would fluctuate between twenty-five and thirty-five members for years to come. Most of the attendees at this first meeting planned to attend the comicon that was scheduled for July 22nd in Dallas.

The first event to bring fans from the region together was the 1966 Southwestern Comicon which was held at the Southland Hotel in Dallas. It was organized by the Dallas Comic Club headed by the Texas Trio, Tom Reamy and Mark Lamberti. Dave Kaler flew in from New York City as the Pro Guest of Honor. By the time con chairman Larry Herndon officially opened the convention on Saturday, over seventy fans were in attendance, and the activity in the dealers room was fast and furious. Large contingents of fans had showed up from Oklahoma and Houston. Rick Norwood and four other Louisiana fans arrived with two carloads full of comics and pulp magazines to sell or trade. Others on hand were Kent

Russell, Howard Waldrop, Camille Cazedessus (publisher of *Erbdom*), Gary Acord, L. L. Simpson and Paul McSpadden. The highlight of the film program was the uncut *King Kong*. In his article on the convention in *Star-Studded Comics* #10, projectionist Mark Lamberti wrote, "There is simply no comparison between *Kong* on a small TV screen and *Kong* on a screen that's almost as big as a wall! And we had the sound up full blast, too, so every time *Kong* roared, man, it literally shook the room!" Immediate plans were made for a follow-up in the following year, this time in Houston.

In March 1967, a group of fourteen Oklahoma fans met to form a comic book club. Bart Bush wrote, "On this cold March day, the garage where we met held the esteemed beginnings of a group that would call themselves the Oklahoma Alliance of Fans, or OAF." They planned to publish their own monthly newsletter to keep members informed about future monthly "garage meetings." The original fourteen OAFs were: Robert A. Brown, Bart Bush, Wilt Conine, Jim Elsey, Steve Fears, Danny Hutton, Larry Latham, Paul McSpadden, Charles Rice, Bruce Shults, David J. Smith, Matt Waldroop, Lee Whittlesey and John Wooley.

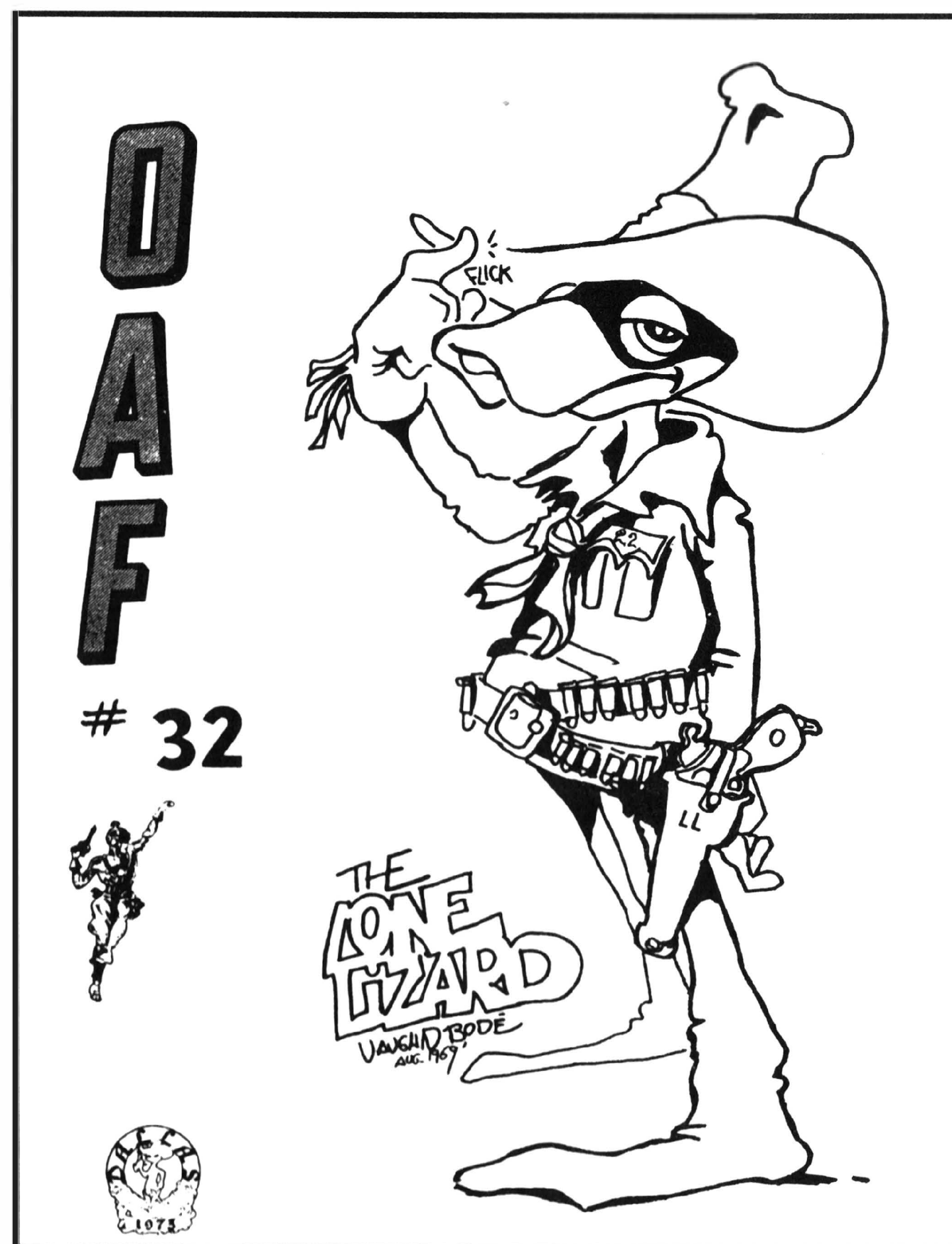


"We all felt a bond develop when as a group we attended the Houston Con in 1967," Bart related. "Nine of us were driven down by Wilt Conine. We became closer friends just by the sharing of stories, knowledge and passing around the comics we had brought with us. Even when the return trip was beset with car troubles, our morale never faltered. To indicate the level of enthusiasm, our OAF newsletter stuck to a monthly publication schedule for the next three years."

The 1967 Houston Con (June 16-18) proved that the Houston Comic Collectors' Association was at least the equal of the Dallas group in terms of con organization. Billed as "the 2nd largest comic convention in the United States," it was held at the Ramada Inn, where a single room could be had for \$7.50 a night. Admittance tickets cost \$2.50 for all three days. The film highlight was a showing of the superb Republic serial *Dick Tracy vs. Crime, Inc.* (A screening of the silent *Metropolis* with no musical accompaniment received a mixed reception.) The con had the usual auctions, door prizes, and much trading and selling. "One young dealer had two stacks of about forty each of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 for \$2.00 each," Roy Bonario recalled. "Later at the auction, *Action* #1 didn't get the minimum bid of \$100.00." One hundred and twenty-four fans showed up. All in all, Houston Con '67 exceeded expectations.

In 1968 the big Texas con alternated back to Dallas, as would be the agreed-upon pattern (until the Dallas-Houston alliance broke down in the 1970s). Con Chairman Tom Reamy brought his sf contacts to bear and Fritz Leiber was one of three pro writers attending. The 1968 Southwestern Con was the most impressive yet, with a separate film room and a program of guest speakers. At the time, everyone felt the figure of one hundred and sixty registered attendees was huge!

Oklahoma Alliance of Fans was instrumental in setting high standards for convention goers. The first big convention the OAF membership put on was Multicon '70. The line-up was Buster Crabbe, Reed Crandall, Jim Harmon, and R.A. Lafferty. OAF went on to sponsor Multicon '72 with Will Eisner, and Multicon '75 with George Pal, Spanky McFarland, Bret Morrison, George Takai and Al Williamson. OAF also developed the Wintercon (an early December con) with guests like Alex Toth, George Evans, Jim Steranko and Archie Goodwin. This yearly show



OAF #32 (February 1970)

rotated between Oklahoma City and Tulsa. By 1972, OAF had grown far beyond its original fourteen founders, gaining members from outlying states as well. Bart Bush listed among the members by then: Don Maris, Bruce Hamilton, Bud Plant, Phil Seuling, G. B. Love, Chuck Wooley, Ken Mitchell, Earl Blair, Chuck Rozanski, Jerry Weist, Jerry Bails, Gary Dolgoff, Dale Manesis, Bob Beerbohm and Roger Hill. "These fellow members helped spread the word about our shows and they all helped out when asked," Bush said. "The camaraderie that OAF developed among so many different personalities was a work of art. We helped advance the hobby with respect and hard work."

In February 1967, Bill Martin sent out a message to fans in the Chicago, which read in part, "Over the past couple of years, fan activity in the Chicago area has been virtually nil. The Chicago Comic Collectors has not had an official meeting in two years. It seems a shame that a city of our size, with its large number of fans, has no organization whatsoever. If you are interested in a resurrection of active fan participation in our area, please contact me." What resulted was the formation of a second-generation comics club in the Windy City dubbed Fantasy, Incorporated. The officers were Bill Martin, John Guzowski and Rich Hauser.

Although one reason for the formation of Fantasy Inc. was to plan the first major comicon for Chicago, the group basically functioned as an active comic club with semi-regular meetings either at Rich Hauser's basement, or a local YMCA. This group of collectors

was mostly interested in artists like Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson and the EC group, perhaps due in part to Rich Hauser's EC fanzine *Spa Fon*, which was published from 1966 to 1969. Plans for a proposed 1968 con were scuttled, because many local fans preferred to go to the big New York bash that Phil Seuling planned for that summer, or other regional cons.

The next stage of "organized" Chicago fandom was spear-headed by Joe Sarno. Hauser and Martin were off to college, and there hadn't been a Fantasy, Inc. meeting in about six months. Sarno formed a mailing list culled from lists provided by Bill Martin and Alex Almaraz, and held the first meeting of the new Fantasy Collectors of Chicago in March 1969. The early meetings took place in the rec room of Joe's home, often with meals provided by his Mom. In 1970 they moved to a meeting room in a local bank. "These meetings were attended by a whole slew of collectors, including Bob Weinberg, co-sponsor of the Chicago Comicon, as well as Alex Eisenstein and his sf author wife, Phyllis, and a bunch of Milwaukee fans including Mike Tiefenbacher." Joe's later meetings involved film showings and appearances by Chicago's only resident comic book artist Russ Heath, with the attendance count reaching as high as sixty-one. But fans had to wait until 1972 for the first real Chicago con.

Out of this "third generation" of Chicago fandom came George S. Breo's excellent offset fanzine *Chronicle*. With the appearance of the first issue in 1972, it almost seems as if it was meant to continue the tradition that had been abandoned by *Star-Studded Comics* at this point. *Chronicle* mostly consisted of comic strips created by the likes of Chuck Dixon (both writing and art), Dennis Fugitake, Stan Sakai, Gary Kato and a then unknown Canadian writer/artist by the name of John Byrne. Other contributors were Duffy Vohland, Jim Engel and Alan Hanley.

In 1966, the same year of the first Southwestern Con in Dallas, the Gateway Comic Art Collectors of St. Louis co-sponsored Gateway Con I as their city's first comicon.

One of the stalwarts of St. Louis fandom was Bob Schoenfeld, who had succeeded Derrill Rothermich and Jim King as editor and publisher of *On The Drawing Board* (formerly *The Comic Reader*), the official newsletter of the Academy.

Gateway Con I registered about eighty fans, making it a solid success. However, the con committee decided to skip 1967 and held Gateway Con II the following year, which was larger and a bit more elaborate. Roy Thomas returned in triumph to his home state as the Pro Guest of Honor. The three day comicon, June 28 through the 30th, offered

film shows (a feature version of the first Flash Gordon serial), a banquet with a speech by Thomas, a dealer room and a panel discussion with some well known fans like Glen Johnson, Alan Hanley and Ed Aprill Jr. Gateway Con II is one of the reasons why the Chicago Fantasy Inc. group decided not to throw their own convention in 1968.

Pittsburgh was slower than other major metropolitan areas in establishing city-wide comic book clubs or mounting conventions. Still, a nexus of fans in the vicinity got together for at least one memorable fan-meet.

Although I became a subscriber to *RB-CC* in 1964, it wasn't until two years later that I made the acquaintance of another member of comicdom in the area. He responded to an ad I had taken out for my fanzine *Incognito* in the *Yancy Street Journal*. His name was Marshall Lanz. Soon Marshall and I became firm friends, and published our own Marvel fanzine together called *The Irving Forbush Gazette*. Together we made trips to nearby Vandergrift to visit Raymond Miller, and marvel over his tremendous collection of Golden Age comic books.

Also nearby was David J. Esser, who was pushing a national comic club called the DC Trade Center. We borrowed Esser's ditto machine and soon were cranking out a steady stream of fanzines, including the early issues of my own *Sense of Wonder* and Lanz' *Panel Art Examiner*.

A catalyzing event was the discovery that Jim Shooter, "boy-genius" comics writer, was living just a couple of miles from my house. Soon Jim was doing artwork for both our fanzines, and regaling us with tales of his visit to New York City in 1966 to meet Mort Weisinger and see in the Superman Broadway show.

The Lanz-Schelly team reached its zenith with a fan-meet that we



Right: Vaughn Bodés "St. Louis Bug" strip, a promotion for the 1969 WorldCon. In 1968 and 1969, Bodé emerged as one of the hottest artists in fandom.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE COUNTRY OF MONGOLIA, UP IN THE NORTH WESTERN MOUNTAINS, MAYBE FIFTY SEVEN MILES FROM THE MONGOLIAN CITY OF 'ULAAN GOOM, THERE IS A PARTICULAR PILE OF ROCKS... *AWH*... WE ARE NOT ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THE ROCKS, NO... BUT... WE NOTICE A TINY, INSIGNIFICANT SPECK NEAR THE ROCKS... ON CLOSER INSPECTION WE DISCOVER THE DINKY DOT BECOMES A TEENY CREATURE WITH A LITTLE PACK ON ITS BACK, TWO LEGS AND NO ARMS!! IT IS, BY NAME, 'LARVA 69', AND IT IS ON A JOURNEY INTO THE PAGES OF ANT HISTORY... IT IS ON ITS WAY TO BECOME A LEGEND IN ITS OWN TIME!... YES... THAT'S RIGHT, YOU GUESSED IT... LARVA 69 IS:

The ST. LOUIS BUG



ISSUE NO. 1

© Copyright 1968 by VAUGHN BODE

OOH MAN, IS I BUSHED! I GOTTA REST ME LITTLE RAPPERS FOR A SECOND...

I BEEN WALKIN' SINCE YESTERDAY... FROM DA ANT PILE... I GOIN' TO ST. LOUIS, U.S. AMERICA...

AHH, DAT FEEL FINE, JUST TO SIT BACK... AN RELAX A BIT...

♪ SO DREEEN DA DOO BE DOO... BRATIA! ♪

♪ AN DIS ODDLY ODD IS DA BUG I IS, AN DAT DA WAY OF COMIC BIZ! ♪

WHUP!... HUMMM... IT A LARVA SLEEPIN' IN DA HOT MONGOLIAN SUN!...

WAKE UP!

YARCH!

GURRR

OKAY WISE BUG! FO DAT DUMB TRICK I GONNA KICK YOU IN DA EYE!!

I DON'T GOT NO EYE....

ALRIGHT, DEN, IN DA MOUTH...

DON'T GOT ONE OF DEM EITHER...

HOW BOUT DA BREAD BASKET...

WHERE YOU GOIN' YOU UGLY LARVA?

DON'T CHANGE DA SUBJECT, BUSTER! WHERE YOU WANT IT?.. HUH? COME ON!

NO... ERR. REALLY, I IS INTERESTED TO KNOW WHERE YOU IS OFF TO...

I GOIN' TO ST. LOUIS U.S. AMERICA... IT KINDA ALONG WALK SO I WAS RESTIN'...

OKAY, DOPE, I BUYS DAT, BUT HOW COME YOU GOIN' WAY DAT FAR AWAY?...

I GOIN' TO DA 1969 WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION... IT VERY IMPORTANT DAT US BUGS AN STUFF GIVE OUR SUPPORT TO DA ST. LOUIS BID...

AREN'T YOU LEAVIN' A LITTLE EARLY IF IT NOT TILL 1969?...

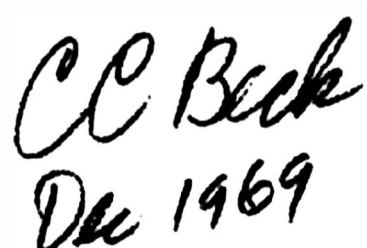
I GOT SHORT LEGS.... AHH, YOU WANNA COME TOO?...

YEAH, OKAY, SURE, I GOT NOTHIN' GOIN' DIS YEAR IN DA MONGOLIAN MTS. SAY I DIDN'T INTRODUCE ME... I IS, ODD....

I KNOW... AN YOU NOT VERY BRIGHT EITHER.

VAUGHN BODE

Alan Hutchinson did a stand-out job on the cover to Marshall Lantz's Irving Forbush Gazette #1 (1967).



One of the sketches done by C. C. Beck at the first major Florida fan gathering in 1969, courtesy of Gary Brown.

billed as "Mini-Pittcon 1967"—which was held at Marshall's house in Penn Hills. Although local luminaries like Miller and Esser couldn't attend, Jim Shooter was there, along with Bill Wilson (*The Collector*), Larry Walczak of Erie, Pennsylvania (*Comic Feature*) and Chuck Rogers (*Fantasy Fandom Crossroads, Bombshell*). The one day get-together, which in many ways was a "fanzine summit" of sorts, led to nearly all the participants contributing to each other's publications. Everyone watched with special interest as Shooter pencilled an Iron Man cover for one of Lanz' fanzines. Probably these fan-meets could have been repeated periodically, had there but a fan in the area who could serve as chief motivator and planner. David Esser's DCTC comics club was always envisioned as a national or even international organization, perhaps as a successor to the moribund Academy; Esser's interest in putting together a local club seemed minimal. Organized fandom in Pittsburgh was still several years away. In larger cities which were later to organize, there were certainly many smaller fan-meets similar to the one described above.

In the case of the Miami area, there *was* one Big Name Fan with the organizational ability to inspire and motivate fans: no less than the editor and publisher of the *Rocket's Blast-Comicollector*, Gordon Love. Love was a key member of the Southern Florida Comic Council, who put on their first convention on December 27th, 1969.

This modest gathering of about thirty comics fans was held in a rented location in Miami. Comicon chairman was Love's friend and *RB-CC* contributor Andy Warner. A showing of *The Good Humor Man* (whose plot revolves around a Captain Marvel club) was the first item on the agenda. The guest of honor was none other than C. C. Beck, Captain Marvel artist supreme. In his account in *RB-CC*, attendee John Ellis breathlessly wrote, "Before the end of his speech, to the amazement of everyone, he *then*, before our very eyes, *inked* four sketches of Fawcett characters [and] donated them to the club, which in turn auctioned them off."

Another key trio of fans were headquartered in Florida: Gary Brown, Wayne DeWald and Alan Hutchinson. They worked on several publications together, including *Comic Comments*, as well as a credible general-zine called *Gremlin*. "When I left for college in the fall of 1965, I was unaware of fandom or any other collectors," Gary Brown recalled. "Wayne DeWald and I were friends in high school and now found ourselves in the same dorm at the University of South Florida. I 'confessed' my hobby to Wayne, who surprisingly said he used to collect and loved comics." Soon Gary and Wayne spotted a plug for *Batmania* in a DC letter column, and ordered a copy. They were hooked.

Just as the duo were leaving for summer vacation, they discovered that popular fan artist Alan Hutchinson lived in St. Petersburg. "I wrote to him and we became fan pen-pals during the summer," Brown remembered. "That fall, when we returned to school, Alan invited us over. We all became life-long friends."

Comic Comments, the news and discussion fanzine, was the first to announce anywhere that Hal Foster was retiring from the Prince Valiant newspaper strip, and the first to interview C. C. Beck (who lived in North Miami). In fact, Brown and DeWald were there at the first Miami con, where Gary bought one of the four drawings Beck inked while everyone gaped.

Gary Brown was asked to pen a regular column for *RB-CC*, which he dubbed "Keyhole"—basically a news column, with a measure of commentary added. It was one of the ad-zines most popular features in the early 1970s.

Oakland, California was the site of one of the first sizable gatherings of comic fans on the West Coast. The one-day affair in January of 1966 took place at the home of fan artist Rudi Franke on Foothill Boulevard. According to attendee Michelle Nolan, about three dozen collectors attended the affair. Naturally old comics were on sale, as were many of the Golden Gate fanzines like *Voice of Comidom* and *Yancy Street Journal*. "I bought the original *Green Lantern* #24 there for \$3, which at that time was top dollar," Michelle wrote. "After the convention ended, I remember that Barry Bauman invited me to his home nearby. His attic was sheer magic! I had never seen so many Golden Age comic books—stacks and stacks of them. I bought thirty or forty comics from the 1940s for a dollar a piece.

"I met Bud Plant, John Barrett and Jim Buser through the ads I placed in the summer 'Kids Classified' section of the San Jose Mercury News," Nolan continued. "I told [them] about Barry Bauman's attic, but none of us could get back up there until I scraped together enough savings to buy my first car."

By 1968 this San Jose contingent had been joined by Dick Swan and Jim Vadeboncoeur. Michelle recounted, "Seven of us decided to pool our meager resources and our extra old comics to open what I am sure was the first 'true' comic book store in the country, the Seven Sons Comic Shop in downtown San Jose." The store open April 1, 1968. They sold nothing but old comic books, and did well at first. By summer's end, however, all the owners were returning to high school or college except for Frank Scandina, so Frank bought the other six out. (Bob Sidebottom's Comic Collector Shop came along a few months after Seven Sons opened.)

To the south, the Los Angeles Comic Book Club in the mid-1960s included a number of fans who became well-known in national comicdom. Rob Gluckson, Jeff Gluckson, Craig Miller, Rob Solomon, Keith Tucker, Steve Sherman, Bruce Simon, Barry Siegel, Mark Evanier and others had held some early mini-cons ("The Festival of Imagination") and interacted a lot with the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, who could be friendly toward comic fans. After all, the roster of

LASFS included many who were at least to some degree appreciated comic art. The LACBC was headed by Mark Evanier, by virtue of his "prominence" as a ubiquitous letterhack of the era, and Rob Gluckson who was a bit of a promoter by nature.

From the very beginning, fans looked to New York City as their Mecca, for it was there that most of the comic books were produced. The assumption that the first comicon to be attended by New York pros would be one held in the Big Apple proved (unsurprisingly) true in 1964.

The 1965 Academy Con was a huge leap forward, though New York's supremacy as the "comicon capital" had to be shared that year with the Detroit Triple Fan Fair. However, in 1966, with the successful mounting of *two* national comic book conventions—sponsored by two entirely different groups—few would deny that New York's proximity to comics industry pros had given it the edge.

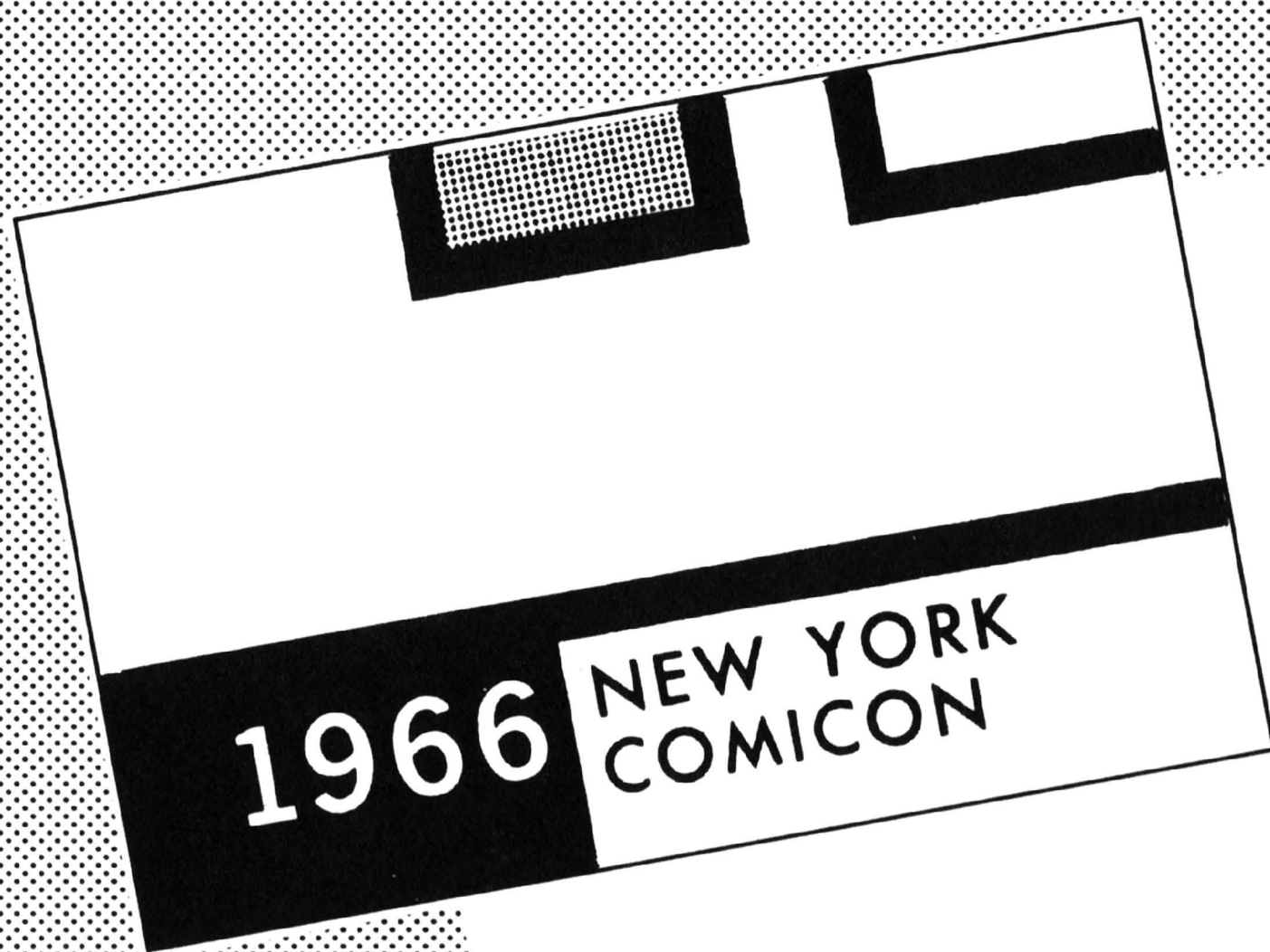
The first of the 1966 conventions was organized by John Benson. It was held July 23 and 24, with Jack Kirby as the Guest of Honor, and film shows by Chris Steinbrunner. "At the end of the weekend [of the 1965 New York Comicon], Dave Kaler announced that he would never put on another convention again," John Benson wrote later. "Having quite enjoyed myself, I thought it would be fun to put on a convention."¹ He enlisted the aid



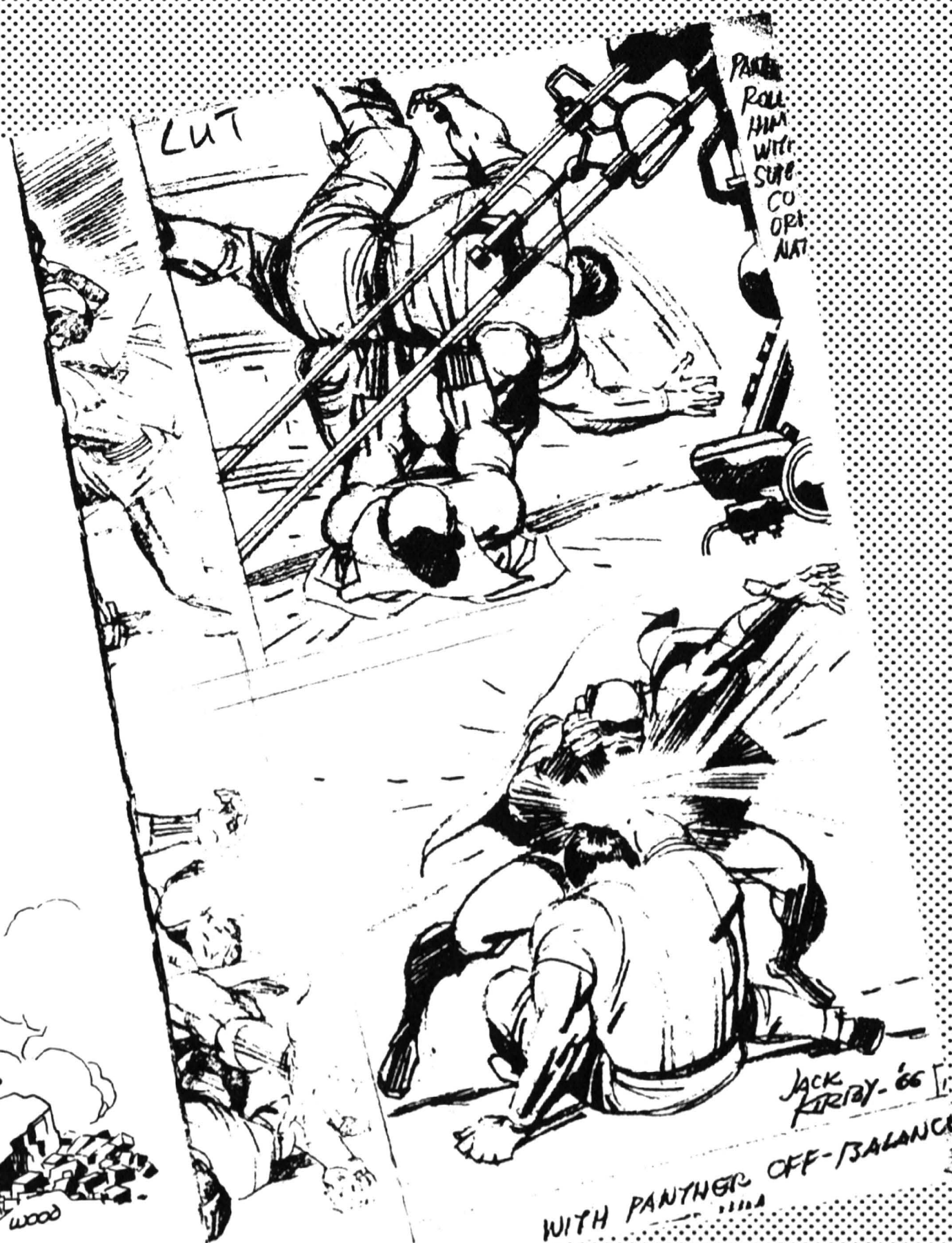
Photograph taken at one of the early Oakland fan gatherings held in Rudi Franke's garage. That's Rudi front and center.



Bud Plant
1968



A blank name tag and program book from John Benson's 1966 New York Con, with covers by Kirby and Wood.



of his friend from the sf Fanoclast group, Mike McInerney, and for the first time the expertise of sf fandom was applied to a comicon. There was a program booklet designed by Bill Pearson, with penciled panels by Jack Kirby on the front cover, and a back cover Wally Wood drew especially for the occasion.

Fans not from the immediate area had to choose which of the two cons to attend. Don and Maggie Thompson picked Benson's. Golden Age artists Klaus Nordling and Jerry Robinson were there, with Robinson providing a display of original art for fifteen-to-twenty prime DC comic book covers from the 1940s (including several by Simon and Kirby). That display of Robinson's collection of original covers has never been equaled at any convention since. The con, which was held at the plush Park Sheraton Hotel, had a polished atmosphere through-out.

One of the memorable moments was a debate between Leonard Darwin of the Comics Code and Don Thompson. Darwin told Ted White and Don Thompson that Bill Gaines should *thank* the Comics Code Authority for virtually driving him to create the magazine version of *Mad*, which had been Gaines' economic salvation. Ted White was livid!

Paul Krassner reported on the convention in *Cavalier* (November 1966) in a surprisingly good article, considering the title: "The Funny Book Fanatics." Krassner, editor of the underground newspaper *The Realist*, was a comic fan. (He published Wally Wood's "Sex in Disneyland," and early work by Art Spiegelman.)

Despite initial avowals to the contrary (made in an exhausted haze at the end of his first comicon), Dave Kaler decided to organize New York Comicon III. He was a believer in the goals of the Academy of Comic Book Fans

and Collectors, and felt it was important to continue an officially-sanctioned and supported convention. In fact, it was called the "AcademyCon." By the time the convention occurred in late August 1966, Kaler had been elected Executive Secretary of the group, and was committed to re-invigorating the Academy after it had drifted for some months.

Kaler was able to attract an impressive contingent of pros, capped off by the first appearance of Stan Lee at a comicon. Lee's talk was a huge success. He puffed theatrically on a cigar while thanking fandom for helping guide Marvel to unprecedented popularity, always in his usual bombastic style. Though Lee had avoided previous cons, he seemed perfectly at ease here, with the instincts of a seasoned public speaker who was comfortable in the spotlight.

This was the year that the costume masquerade really came

into its own. Many well-prepared costumes were on display, with attendees appearing as Spider-Man, Bat-Girl, Batman, Robin, Catwoman, Superman, the Spectre, Hourman, the Golden Age Green Lantern, Captain America, Mysterio, Speedboy, Nightshade and The Man In Black.

The second Kaler-con was an improvement over Dave's first attempt, though it lost some points in terms of its overall organization (compared to the well-oiled Benson effort a month before). Still, attendance was up, and the roster of pros was impressive. From all reports, the fans were well-satisfied with the con. [See Chapter 10 for accounts of the 1967 and 1968 New York comicons.]

After the success of his 1966 New York Comicon, Benson initiated a monthly meeting of people interested in comics in New York City—social occasions held at the apartments of Roy Thomas, Bill Pearson, Archie Goodwin (briefly) and Jeff Jones. Neal Adams, Wally Wood, Angelo Torres and Steve Ditko were regular attendees. Even Stan Lee showed up twice. The sole purpose of the gatherings (which ranged from twelve to thirty) was an evening of conversation. The monthly meetings continued for five years, and ended only when

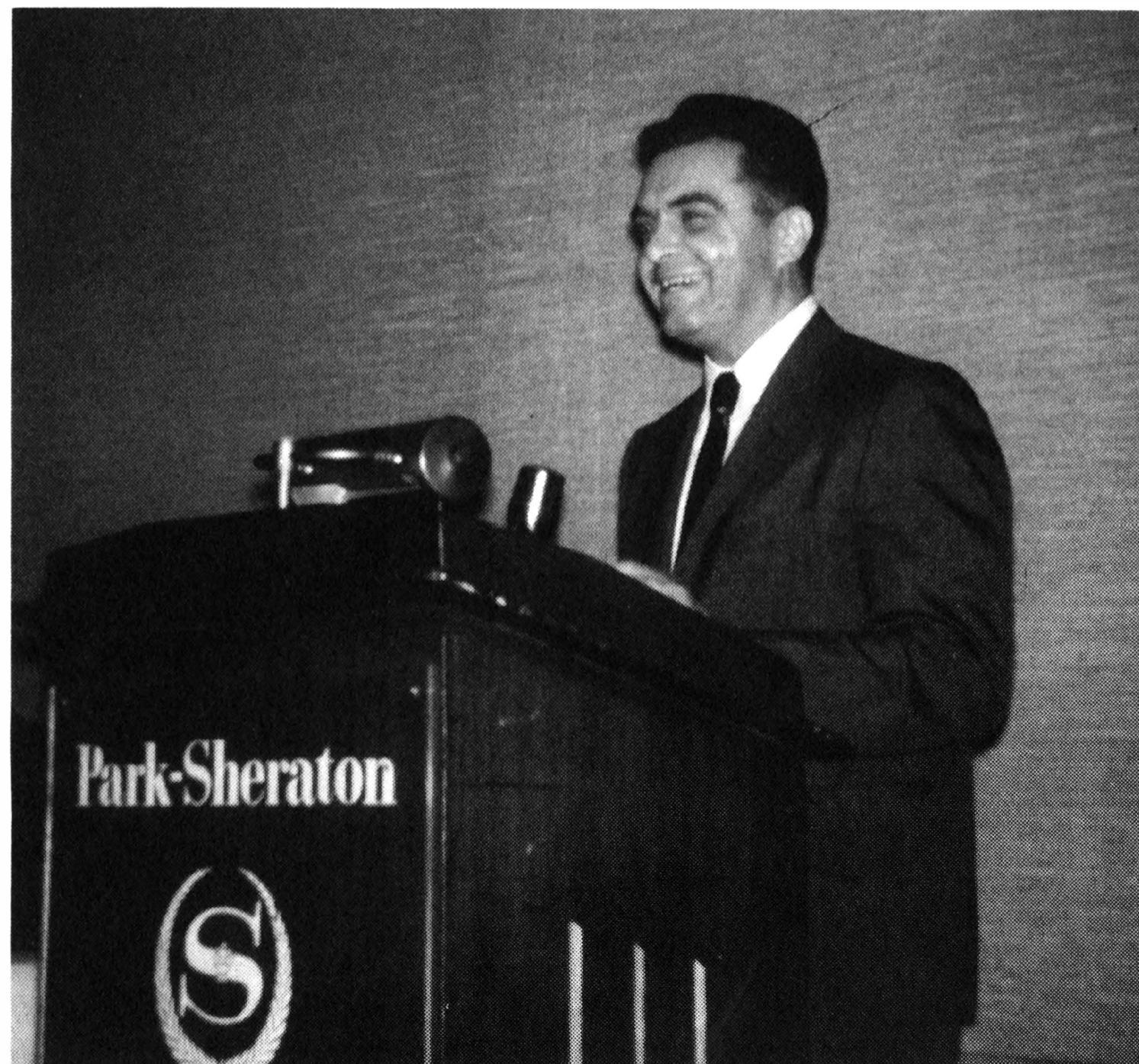
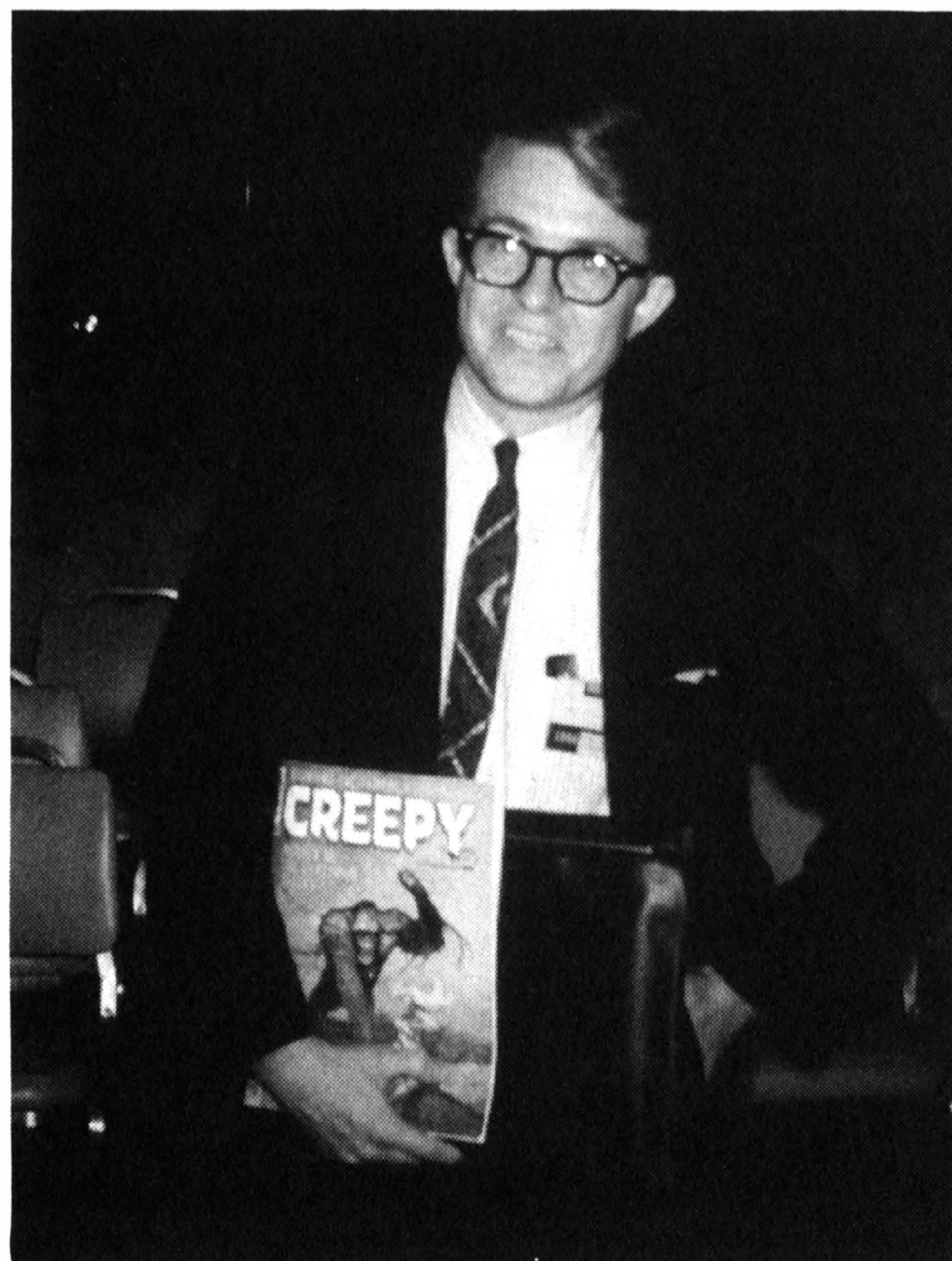
Jeff Jones (the final host) moved out of town, and they were so large that no one wanted to host them.

One of the favorite activities of fans in the Greater New York area was to sojourn up to Rutland Vermont for the Halloween Parade. The parade originated in 1960, when the Rutland Recreation Department decided to sponsor a Halloween parade. The first one wasn't particularly impressive, consisting of two bands and some school kids marching along in their costumes. But Tom Fagan, who was in the audience, got an idea. Why not make Batman the official Parade Marshall? Recreation Commissioner John Gioffredi gave his blessing to the idea, and the next year saw Batman's first appearance, astride the first Bat-Float. The parade that year was a huge success. Soon the parade included several more bands, more floats, a Mr. Jack O'Lantern and Pumpkin Princess competition and more members of the Batman "family"—Robin, Batwoman, Bat-Mite and the new Bat Girl.

Fandom at large became aware of the Rutland parade with Tom Fagan's article "The Big Parade" in *Batmania* #3 (1964).

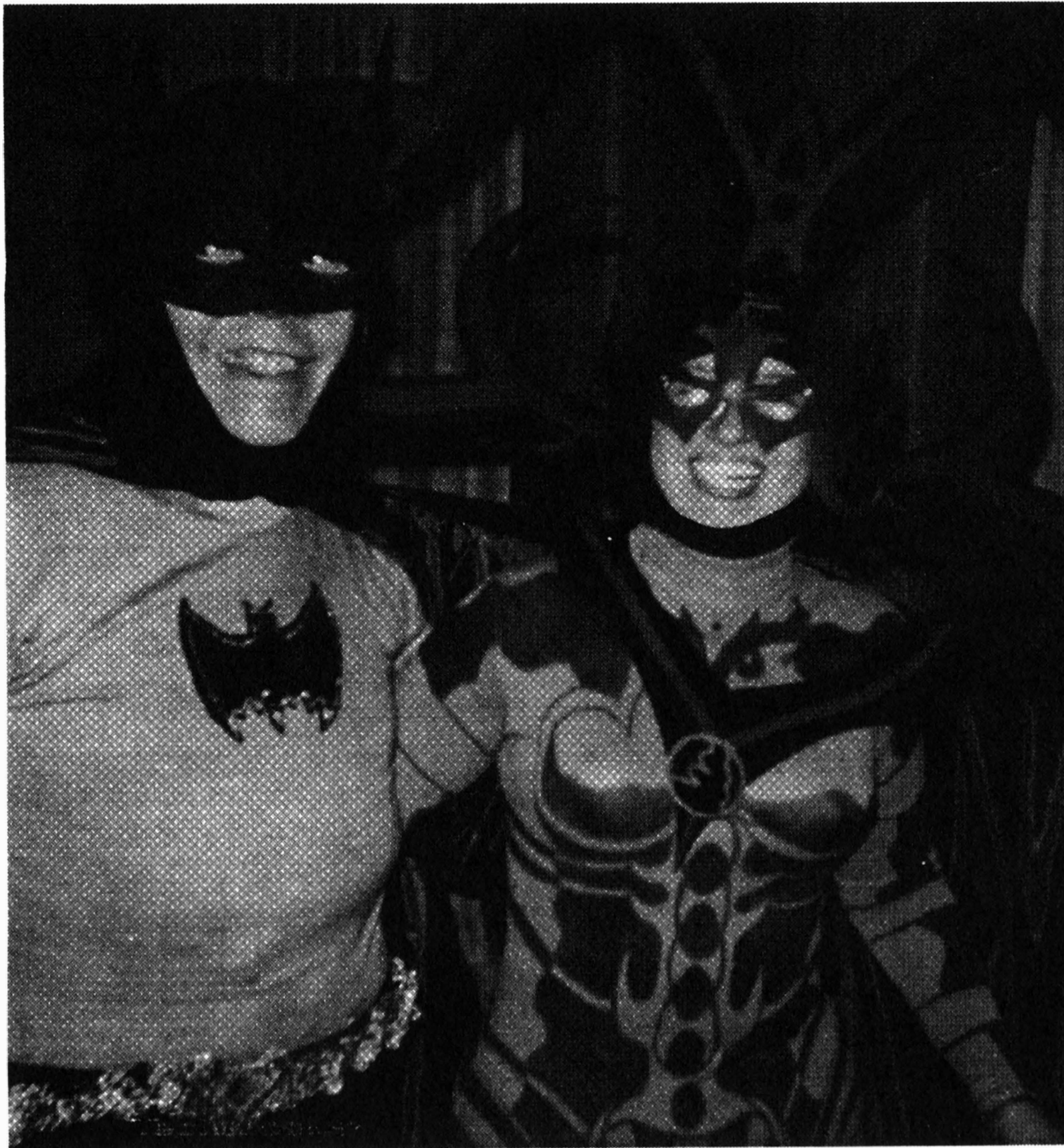
Comics fans from out of town first showed up in 1965: Roy Thomas wore his Plastic Man

outfit, sharing the float with Dave Kaler as Dr. Strange. The 1969 10th anniversary parade expanded to include numerous Marvel characters, as Fagan's invitation to fandom in general gained greater circulation. "I felt that people who worked on the parade did an awful lot of work and didn't get anything but a thank-you note," Fagan remembered. "I thought we should have a party for them afterwards."² The early parties took place at his house on Pine Street, but when he became the caretaker of the Clement Mansion (which had once been the governor's residence), space was no longer at a minimum. Fagan related, "There was just my wife, my daughter, two dogs and me in this huge, huge house. Here was the perfect place for a party! In 1968 the doorbell started ringing at 12 o'clock and just kept ringing, and in came all the people I had invited. Tom Watkins was one of the first—he came as Wonder Warthog. They would come in costume after the parade. Then the TISOS people would show up—The Illegitimate Sons of Superman."² This group consisted of Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, Mark Hanerfeld, Andy Yanchus, Irene and Ellen Vartanoff, and Rich Rubinfeld. The parties kept growing and growing, until they consisted of several hundred



PHOTOS BY JACK C. HARRIS

Archie Goodwin and Jack Kirby at the first New York Comicon in 1966

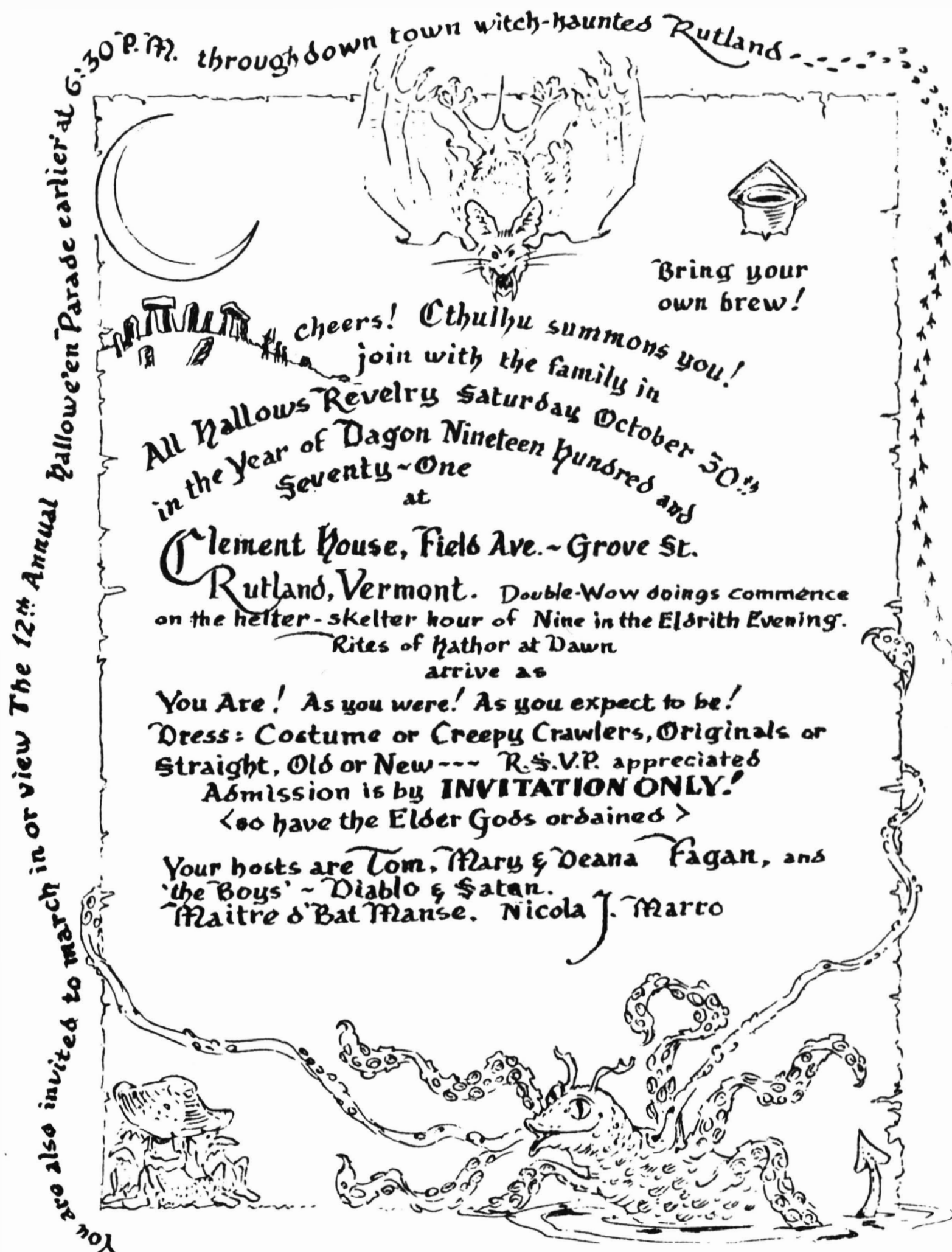


Tom Fagan as Batman, with Sue O'Neil as Hela, 1971

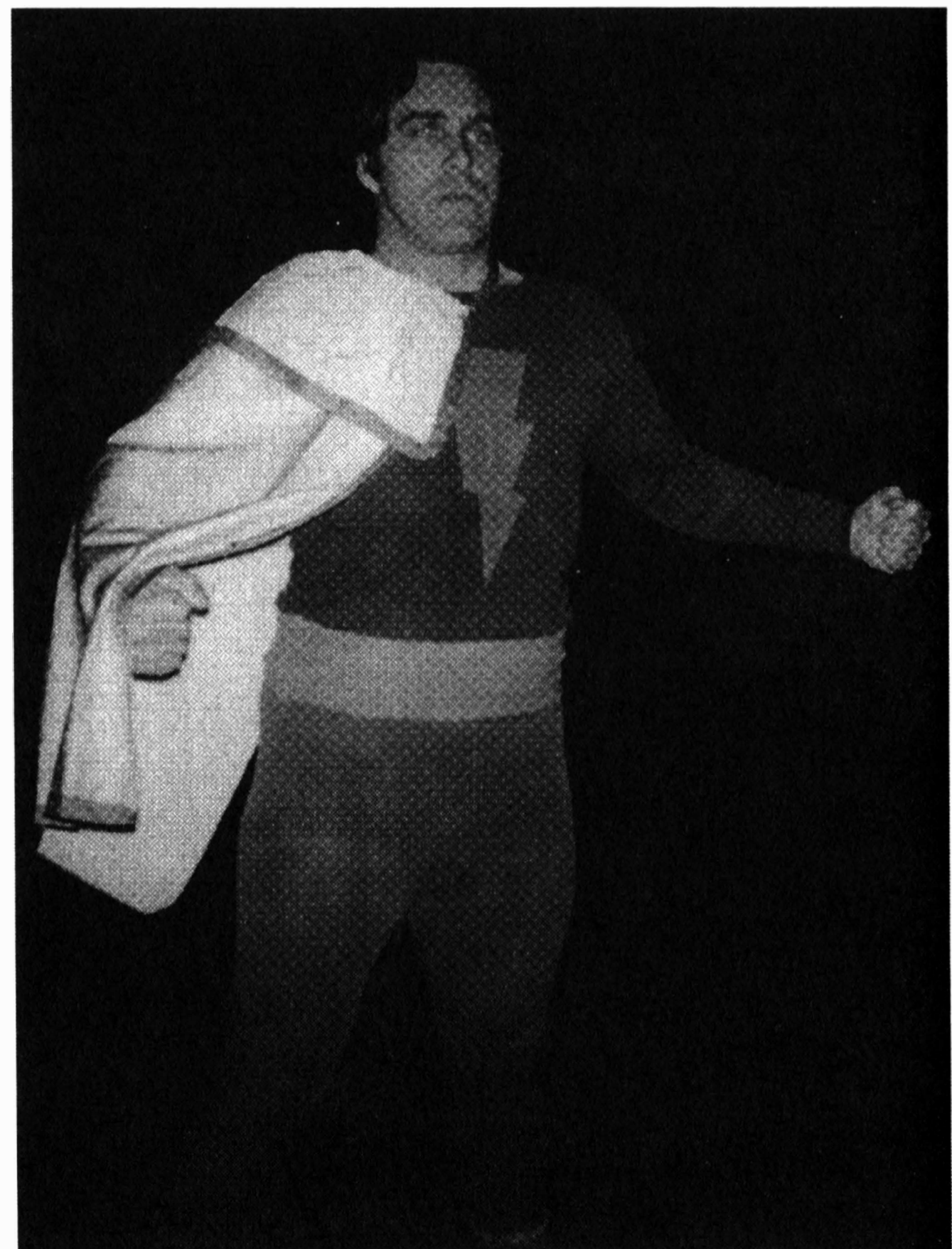


"BATMAN" © NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Batmania #3 (1964) illo by Biljo White



Rutland party invitation, 1971



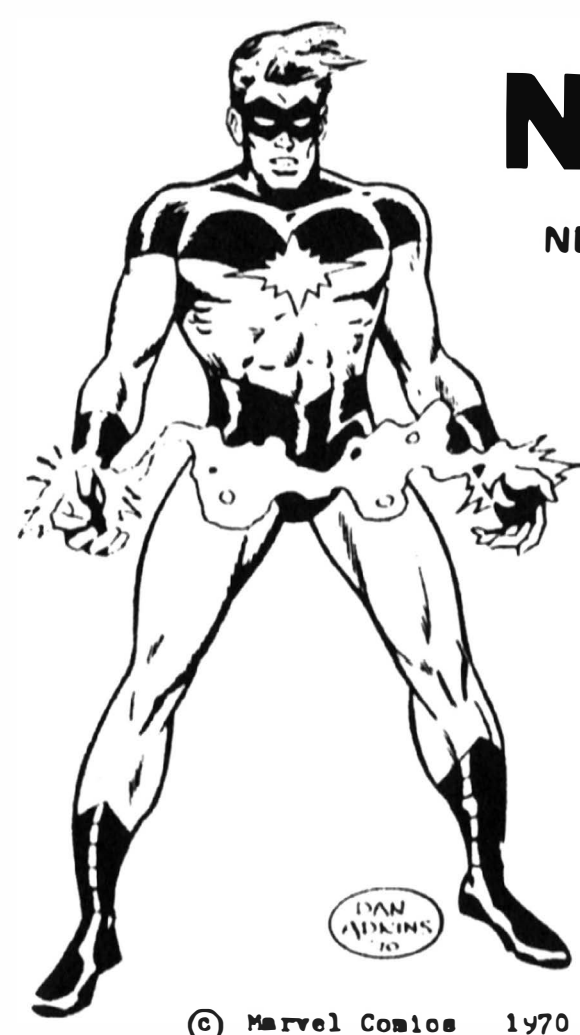
Phil Seuling looking svelte in his Capt. Marvel togs

guests each year. In 1974, the party took place in an abandoned church, and the last one took place the following year in the town's recreation center. The Rutland Halloween Parade continues to this day. "They are one of the biggest events in Rutland, believe it or not," Fagan concludes fondly. "It's a legacy I'm kind of proud of."² (A total of six comic book stories used the Rutland parade and parties as a backdrop, published from 1970 to 1973 in DC and Marvel comics.)

Toward the end of the decade, a triumvirate of talented fan artists and publishers emerged in the New England area. They were Martin Greim, Bob Cosgrove and Al Bradford. Greim of Dedham, Massachusetts published *Comic Crusader*, and Cosgrove had his own fanzine called *Champion*. Bradford recently wrote, "In 1968, when I was a freshman at New England School of Art, I met Bob Polio, who later went on to do graphics and production work for New England Comics. Bob showed me a wonderful discovery of his: a rundown little shop in a nearby town called Stan's Magazine Exchange. On the ground floor they sold sleazy men's magazines, but in a little upstairs gallery

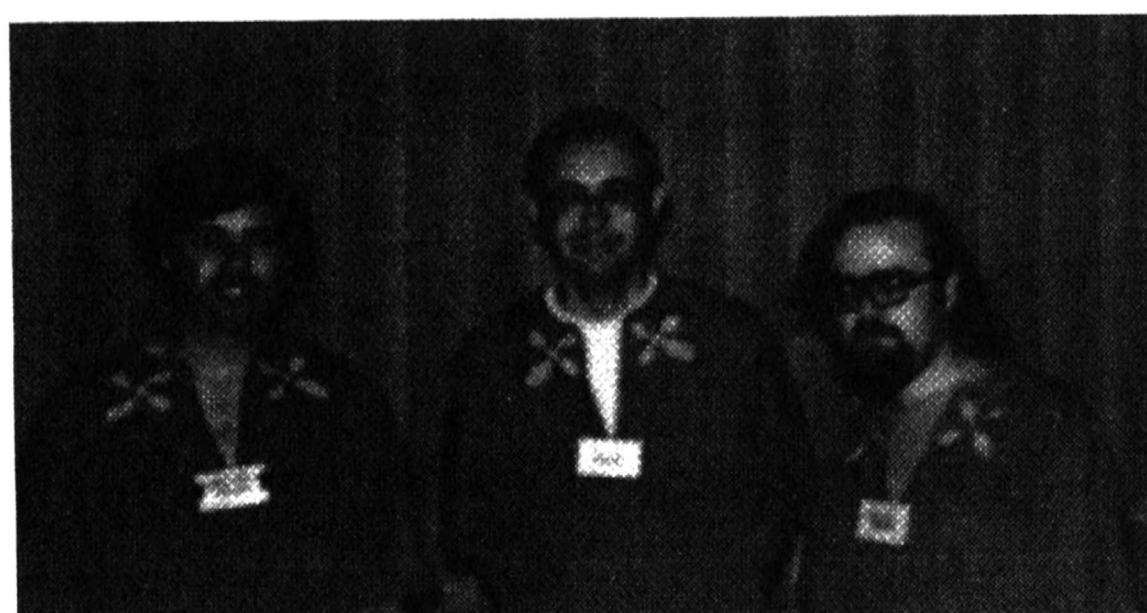
there were thousands of old comic books for sale. Presiding over this treasure trove was a bespectacled wise guy named Bob Cosgrove, who soon introduced me to Marty

Greim." In 1972, this trio (sometimes nicknamed the Boston Butchers) founded Newcon, New England's first comic convention. Newcon would bring some of the biggest comic book pros to Boston, from Carl Barks to Harvey Kurtzman to Gil Kane to John Stanley. In their way, the Boston Butchers' contributed to fandom of the early 1970s as much as the Texas Trio and Golden Gate group did to the mid-1960s.

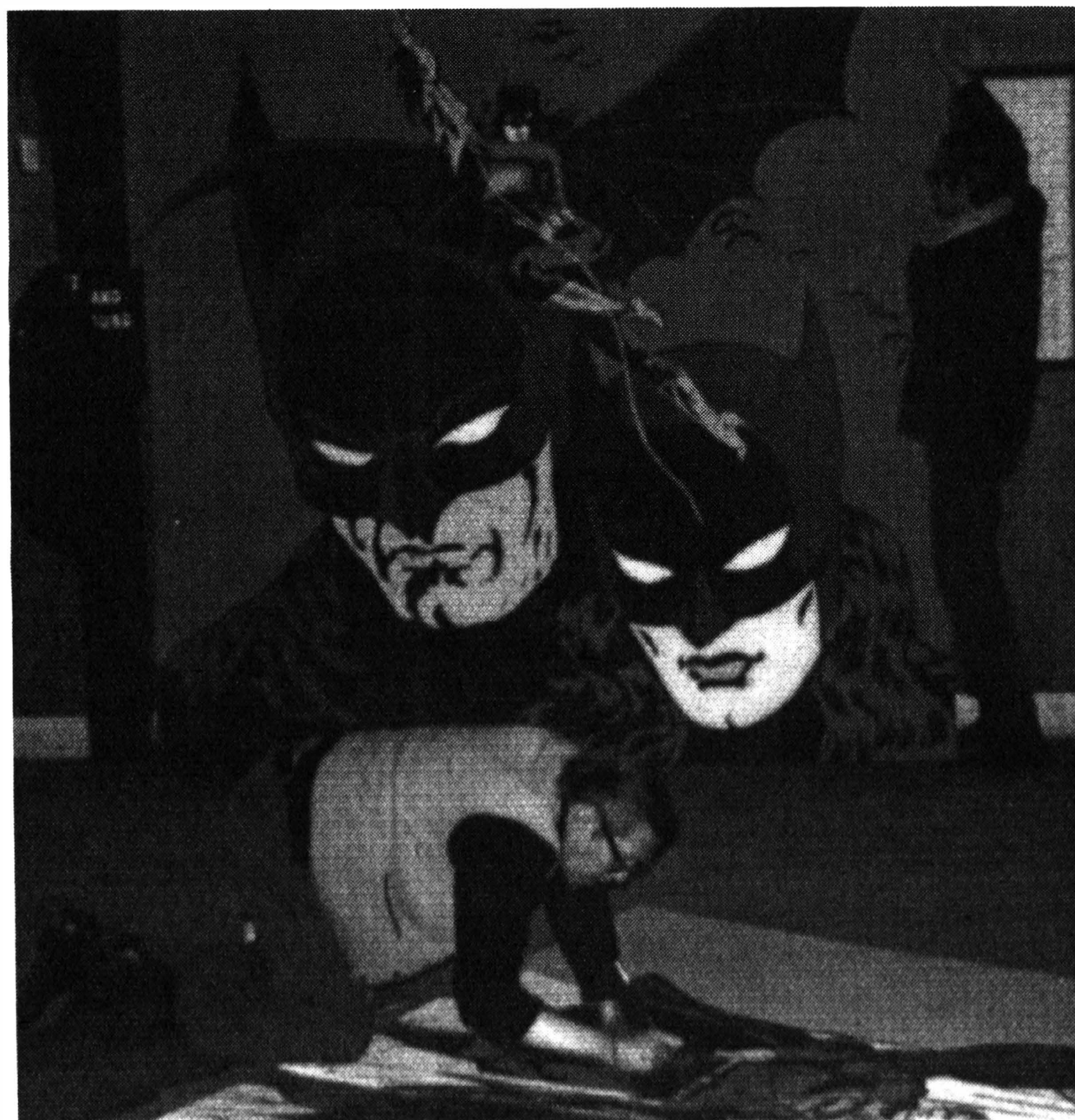


NEWCON '72

NEW ENGLAND COMIC ART CONVENTION



Slightly blurry, but essential, group photo of Al Bradford, Marty Greim and Bob Cosgrove, in "Capt. Marvel" dashikis made by Marty's ex-wife Ellie.



Rutland float backdrop by Steranko. Tom Fagan in the foreground, and Marty Greim in the background. (1970)

RUTLAND PARADE PHOTOS BY AL BRADFORD

Footnotes - Chapter 9

Note: The author would like to particularly thank the following fans for their contributions to this chapter: Greg Theakston, Roy Bonario, Bart Bush, Joe Sarno, Gary Brown, Michelle Nolan, Mark Evanier, John Benson, Bob Beerbohm, Roy Thomas, Tom Hegeman, Bob Cosgrove and Tom Fagan.

¹John Benson, "Comics Convention Programs," 1990 flier.

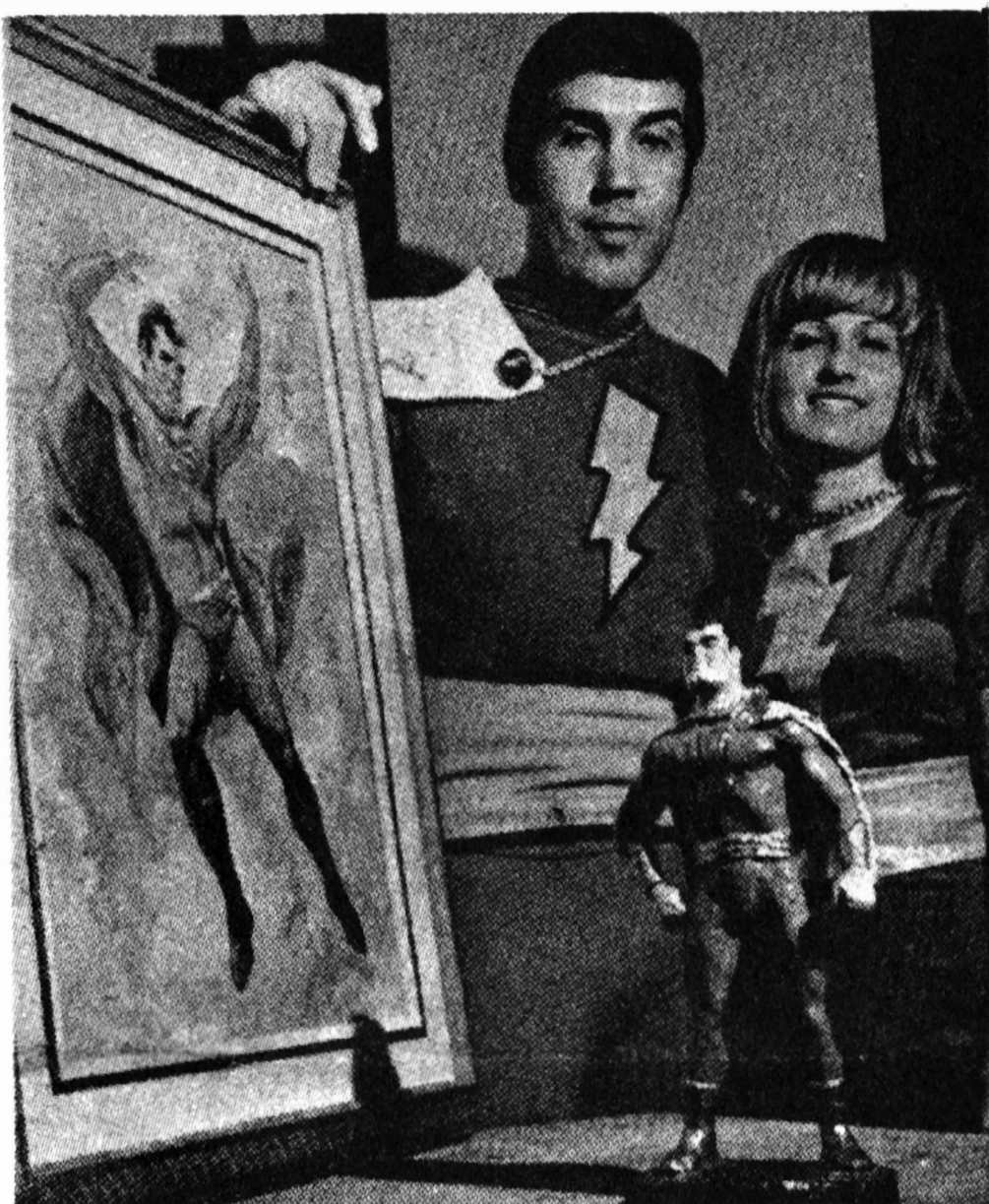
²Roy Thomas, "Hi! I'm Your Host, Tom Fagan!," interview appearing in *Comic Book Artist/Alter Ego* #3 (Fall 1998).

150 Attend

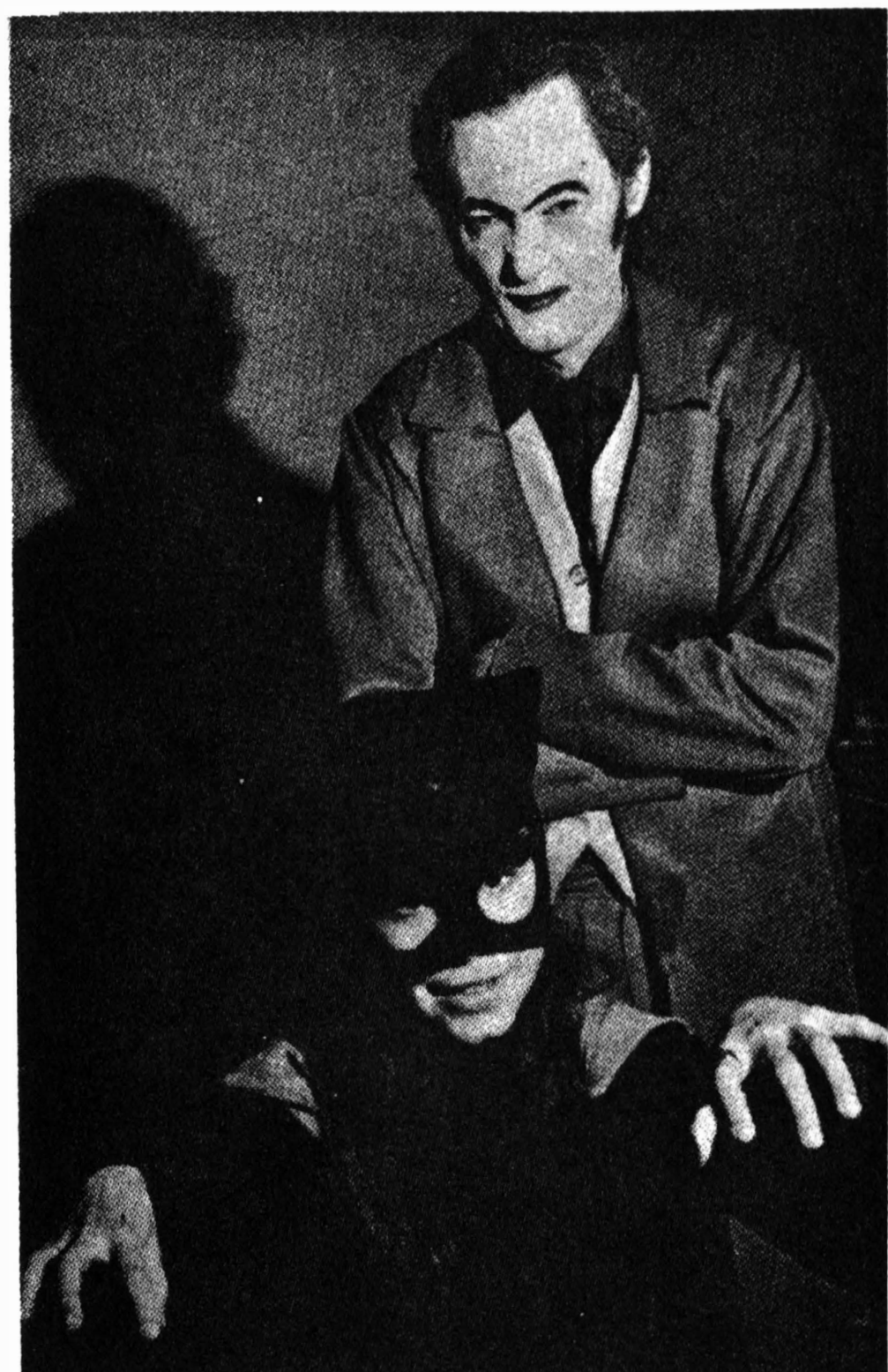
THANKSGIVING WEEK

PHOENIX CON 1970

ACCLAIMED SUCCESS



Art teacher's dress as Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel. From left Don Newton, art teacher at Mountain View Elementary School, and Pat Long of Scottsdale, teacher at Longfellow School in Phoenix.



Show chairman Bruce Hamilton of Scottsdale as the "Joker," and his daughter Leslie Hamilton as the "Cat Woman," characters from Batman and Robin comics.

Comic Book Fanciers Have Their Day

BY MAL BERNSTEIN

SCOTTSDALE - There was a note of nostalgia in the Patio room at the Scottsdale Ramada Inn, 333 W. Main, last weekend as exhibitors from around the country presented Arizona with the first "Comicon," a convention of comic-book fanciers.

Among the thousands of comic books on display were those with such titles as Superman, The Green Hornet, Batman and Robin, The Green Lantern, The Human Torch, Marvel comics and Buck Jones.

The comic books which cost many of us 10 cents not too many years ago have now become collector's items with a price tag among the comic book buffs ranging as high as \$550.

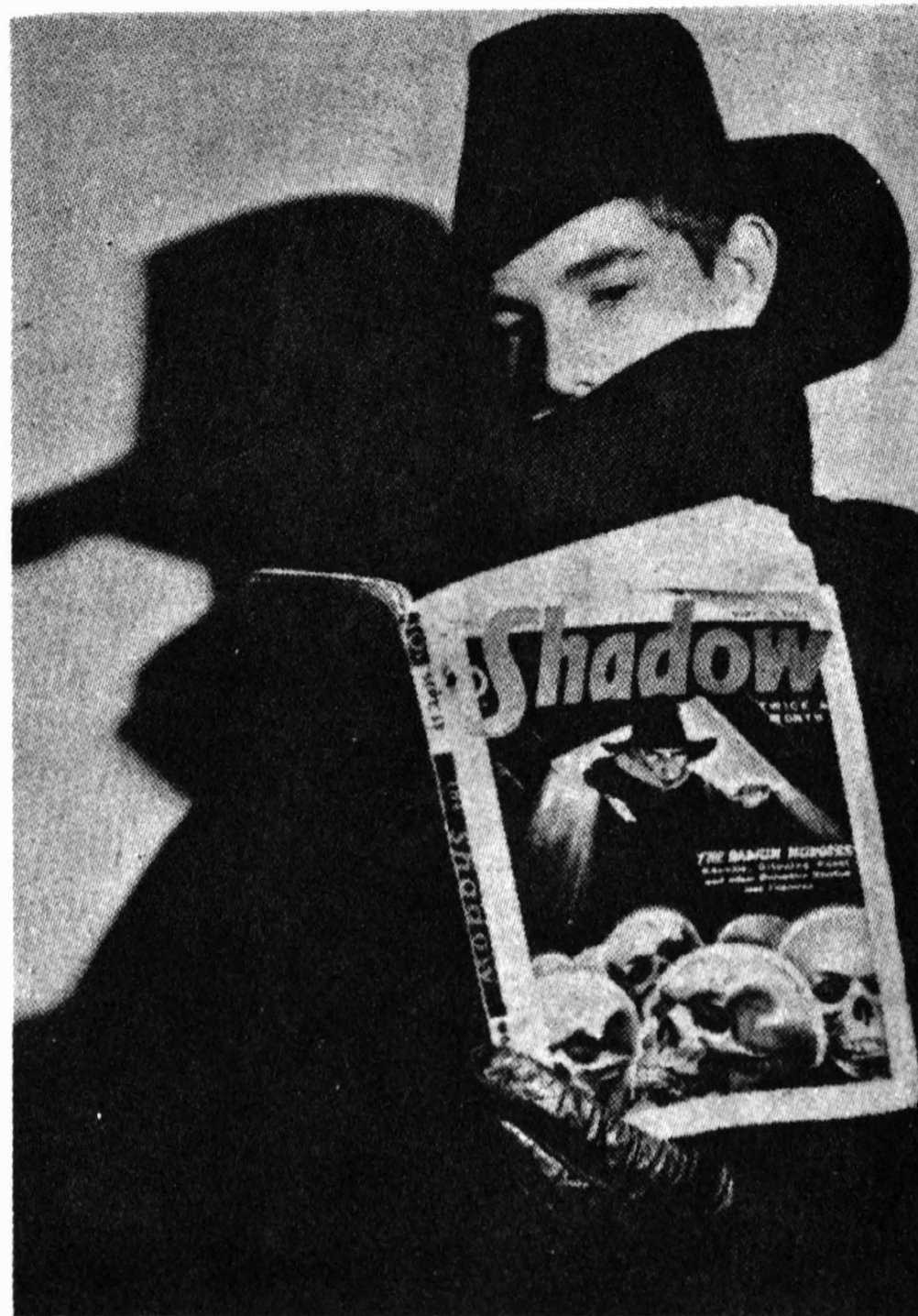
Bruce Hamilton of Scottsdale, a disc jockey for radio station KBUZ, was chairman for the show.

Hamilton said, "Comicons are becoming popular throughout the United States. Our purpose is to introduce to the people of Arizona the values of the publications.

"People interested in becoming involved with comic book collectors and forming an Arizona organization of collectors may contact me at 949-1966."

The three-day event included a comic book auction, film showings, an original art auction by Mountain View Elementary School Art Teacher Don Newton of Phoenix and a masquerade party, which I shared in judging.

I would have selected the comic book hero "The Invisible Man," as the winner of the masquerade contest as the

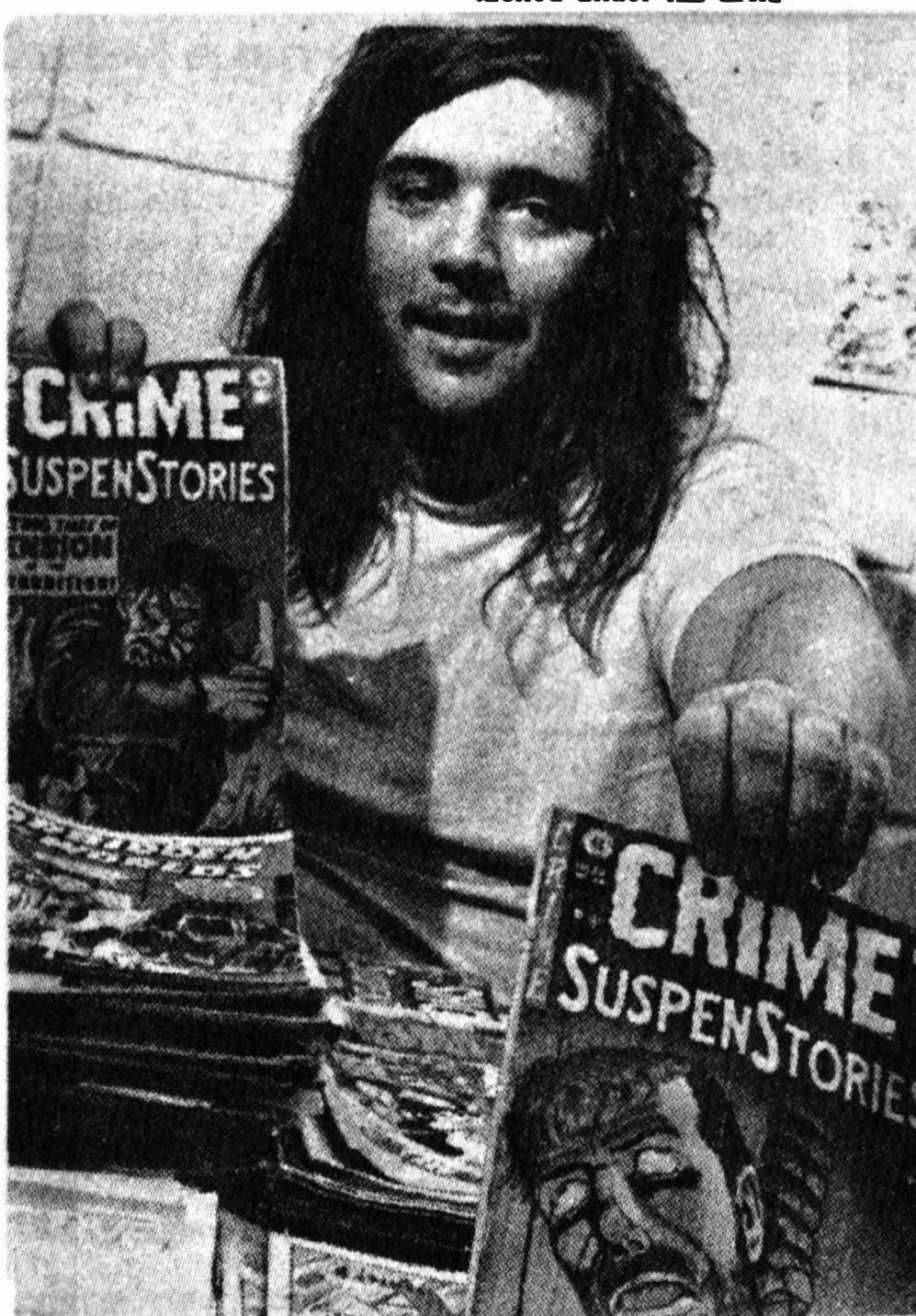


"THE SHADOW KNOWS" - John Clark, Valley resident and winner of the masquerade ball contest with his hand-made costume. Clark dressed as "The Shadow," is displaying a Sept. 15, 1937 copy of Shadow magazine.

winner if I knew for sure the group had a good sense of humor.

It would have been interesting to see the reaction of everyone as I informed them he had the best costume. He was invisible.

John Clark, a young man from Phoenix, won the honors for best costume as the Shadow. He made his own costume and walked around with a Sept. 15, 1937 "Shadow Magazine," tucked under his arm.



Dave Gibson holds comic book which was shown to Senate Committee during an investigation of the comic book industry in 1954.

introduction of Superman in 1939 and reached a high point during World War II, when many heroes were created to battle the Axis powers.

"Crime comics became popular in the late forties and early fifties. They became the target of the Senate investigative committee in 1954 as a result of a book written by Dr. Frederick Worthen, which revealed too much violence, sex and lewd pictures in the comic books.

"Bloodshed and violence have been eliminated from the comic pages along with sex as all comic books must bear a seal of good conduct. They must be approved by the comics code authority."

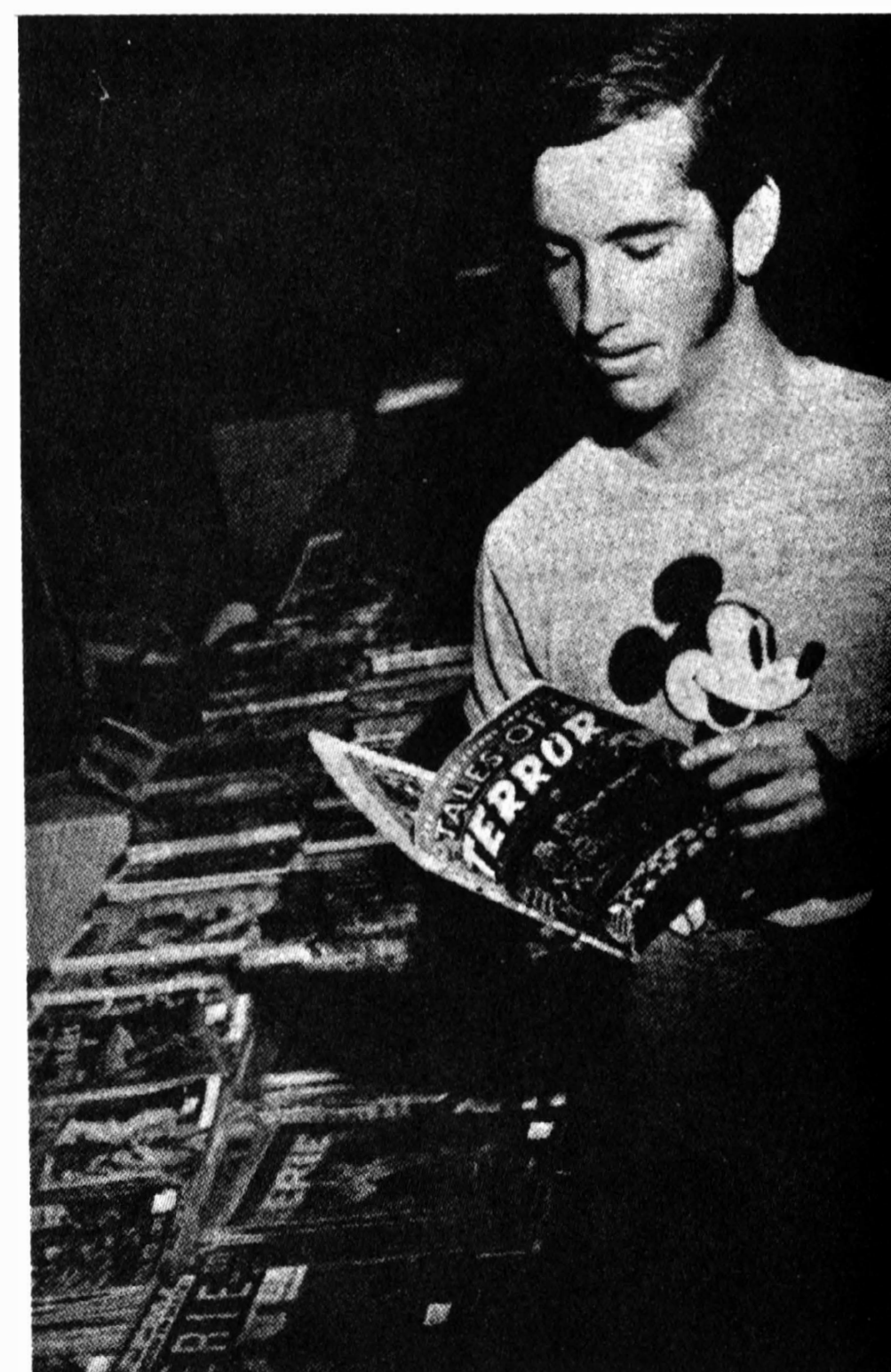
Gibson displayed a copy of a comic book titled, "Crime Suspense Stories," which was shown to the Senate committee as an example of comics printed in poor taste. This was the final copy of a gory comic book, according to Gibson.

A display of Buck Rogers comics is on loan from various collectors at the Scottsdale Public Library. The original 1930 comic strip of "Sunken City of Atlantis," is located at the library for an indefinite period.

Perhaps comic book collecting will someday be a hobby like stamp and coin collecting. It certainly is nice to see a group of people taking an interest in preserving a part of Americana.

Except for the Stars and Stripes and apple pie, there can be nothing more American than the good old comic book.

SEE YOU IN '72!



John Barrett of San Jose, Calif., looking over some of his comics on display which were offered for sale at prices from two cents to \$20.

Comics and Comicons Grow Up

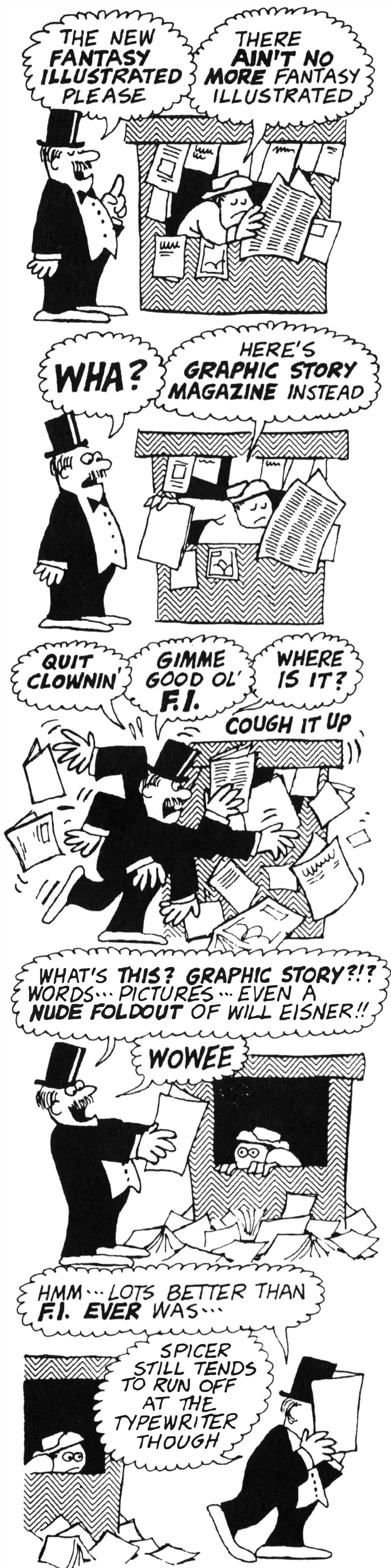
By 1967, life in the United States was changing. Dramatic world events and built-up societal tensions led to a cracking of the constraints that had shackled public debate, behavior and morés in the early 1960s, and entertainment media increasingly reflected those changes.

Whereas in 1961, when TV news presented a sometimes disturbing but expected tapestry of ordinary current events, the TV in 1967 brought horrific images of the Viet Nam war into living rooms across the country. Movies like *Bonnie and Clyde* reflected this violence, and *The Graduate* broke new ground for sexual frankness. In the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco, the Summer of Love was in full swing.

The comic book output from the major companies was, by and large, locked into the old patterns. A few superficial concessions were made to contemporary slang ("Groovy!") but at least officially, the social fabric of American life was portrayed about the same as always. Super heroes still fought super villains, and no new trends in mainstream comics emerged. *Batman* was the top-seller with an average paid circulation of 805,700; Marvel's top book was *Amazing Spider-Man* at 340,155 copies. About a third of the approximately one hundred comic titles in 1967 featured super heroes, with the rest an assortment of humor, romance, science fiction, war and western comics. In the 1967 Alley Awards, *Amazing Spider-Man* was voted Best Adventure Title, *Fantastic Four* was Best Group, and Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were selected Best Writer and Artist.



Bill Black's wild "The Girl From ... LSD" strip in his Paragon Illustrated #2.



But, outside the mainstream, an artist named Robert Crumb was creating what would be the first popular underground comix title, *Zap Comix* #1 (Fall 1967). Robert Crumb and his brother, you'll recall, had been publishing their offset amateur comic *Foo!* in the late 1950s. Crumb went on to successfully write and draw greeting cards in the early 1960s until he grew dissatisfied with the restrictions and made the transition to underground comix work in mid-decade.

According to Jay Kennedy, author of *The Underground and Newwave Comix Price Guide*, "Underground comix marked a radical change in the direction of comic book art. They shifted the reason for doing a comic book from the telling of a plot-centered fantasy adventure story to unrestrained personal expression. Underground comix changed the understanding of what a comic book can be."¹

Comix also began the trend toward creator-owned titles, for "underground" publishers bought only one-time printing rights, and artists often edited, wrote, drew and lettered their own books, delivering the finished packages to the publisher.

Comic fandom was a diverse group, encompassing people of a wide range of ages, education, economic backgrounds and interests. Most of the teenage fans, who had no access to the head shops and other distribution outlets for underground comix near college campuses, continued to follow the super heroes. But a goodly number of college-age and older fans pursued an interest in the more adult-oriented comic strips of the past and present. They began to see the potential of the medium as a form of entertainment for adults. The search for respectability for the art form would come faster when the content of the graphic story went beyond juvenile subject matter.

Left: Cartoon dramatizing the change of titles of Bill Spicer's fanzine, by Vince Davis.

New attention was paid to the achievements of the EC war comics, under the editorial hand of Harvey Kurtzman, and to a comic strip from the 1940s and early 1950s that found new currency when Harvey Comics released two reprint editions of Will Eisner's *The Spirit* in late 1966. In Eisner's sublime story-telling and solid craftsmanship, comicdom found an expression of the potential of the sequential art medium that fully satisfied adult sensibilities.

Richard Kyle was an early advocate of comics as a medium for adult entertainment. He wrote, "All during the early years of comic books I was interested in the medium as a storytelling form—particularly during the Charles Biro [*Crime Does Not Pay*] and EC eras—and although by the end of the '50s the Comics Code had turned comics into an almost completely juvenile field, I still kept in touch with what was going on." Starting with "The Education of Victor Fox" for *Xero* #8, Kyle proved himself to be one of the most erudite commentators on comics. [See Chapter 4]

In November 1964, writing in *Capa-alpha*, Kyle coined the terms "graphic story" and "graphic novel" to pertain to the artistically serious works that had been done in comics in the past, and would be produced in the future. In the summer of 1965, in his "Graphic Story Review" column in *Fantasy Illustrated* #4, he announced the terms to comicdom in general.²

"I invented the terms, but it was Bill Spicer who popularized them," Kyle recalled recently. "Without Spicer's fanzine, I doubt if they would be used today."

Spicer and Kyle were kindred spirits; Bill's own interests similarly focused on the "artistically serious" works of the past and present, and with his eighth issue (Fall 1967) he announced a title change to *Graphic Story Magazine*. In that issue's editorial, Spicer explained, "I realized that I didn't really want to produce or print stories that illustrate fantasy. Not totally. Some, yes, but not a whole book of them. The old title was becoming increasingly confining, and it no

longer seemed as pertinent as it once had; it was restrictive and, often, too inappropriate. If the magazine continues to change in direction and emphasis—and it looks as though it will—then I felt justified in re-naming it to house the material...."3

Actually, the metamorphosis had begun with the prior issue, which featured a strip with a dream-like, almost psychedelic feel by an artist new to fandom named George Metzger. At least six months before *Zap Comix* #1 was being sold in the streets of Haight-Ashbury, Metzger's "Master Tyme and Mobius Tripp" was providing readers of *Fantasy Illustrated* #7 (Spring 1967) with a trip of their own. Hard to follow at times, with lettering that seemed to take on organic life, "Master Tyme" blew fans' minds with its audacity and wild imagery.

"When I got home [from the army] in 1965, acid was king and rock and roll was god," Metzger wrote. "I'd been drawing while in the army. After a year of school, I began the stuff that Spicer ran. 'Master Tyme' is representative of a lot of stuff. Years of science fiction, California bohemianism, drugs ... and rock and roll posters." It was the first of a half dozen similar efforts that its writer/artist turned out, not just for *GSM* but for *Gosh Wow!* and *Voice of Comixdom*.

In addition to Metzger, *GSM* #8 offered a two-color strip conceived by Spicer called "At Sea." He based it on a 1965 short story by Alan Riefe, did the breakdowns, and colored it; the art itself was by Jim Gardner. In contrast to *Master Tyme*, "At Sea" has crystal clear continuity, as it follows the ordeal of a man trapped on a raft on the ocean with no drinking water. What is remarkable is that Spicer constructed his narrative without captions, dialogue or thought balloons; and yet every moment, every shifting thought in the desperate man's mind, is conveyed to the reader.

Graphic Story Magazine also presented unusual works by artists, some of them professional, who were outside the usual ranks of comicdom. Bob Foster offered



"Master Tyme" by George Metzger (*Fantasy Illustrated* #7).



Bill Pearson, Bill Spicer, Richard Kyle and (below left) John Benson, outside Spicer's California HQ.

DOCTOR WEIRD

NO. 2
SUMMER

MASTER OF THE MACABRE!



Jim Starlin art, in the summer of 1971. Doctor Weird is now being published by Gary Carlson and Edward DeGeorge, in his own title and in the pages of Big Bang Comics.

comic turns like "Necktie Party," "Abominable," and "War Machine." Vince Davis contributed "The Choice" and "The Last Weapon." And Vaughn Bodé achieved considerable exposure in *GSM* #10 (Spring 1969), with his "The Man" strip based on the daily life of a comical prehistoric fellow, as well as "The Machines."

Meanwhile, Kyle's "Graphic Story Review" studied the medium under a microscope, looking for promising new trends and extolling the merits of past comics with adult appeal.

On the medium's future: "Like the novel and the drama, the graphic story's limitations and strengths are only those of its creators and their insights into the essential human substance: Art does not make truth, truth makes Art."⁴

On Jim Warren's *Blazing Combat*: "Inescapably, one compares *Blazing Combat* to ... *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*; inevitably, the comparison is unfavorable."⁵

On Eisner's "The Spirit": "No one—not even Harvey Kurtzman or Bernard Krigstein or Alex Toth—has ever quite had Eisner's full command of breakdown, for no one else has ever quite had his gifts as a writer and artist and editor, too, and all these must come together to form the complete personal statement that breakdown represents."⁶

Richard Kyle wasn't the only one in the pages of *GSM* to write on this plane. Bill Spicer's own "New Directions For The Graphic Story" tackled much the same territory, and John Benson and Harry Habblitz contributed their insights in related areas. The pages of *Graphic Story Magazine* offered not only the most innovative amateur comic strips, but possibly the most challenging and provocative articles ever written about the medium itself. For this reason, Spicer's fanzine is considered one of the zeniths of fan achievement, and is undoubtedly responsible for inspiring the development of many who would go on to become leading writers and artists in future comics.

Not that there weren't other fanzines who had reached out beyond the world of super hero fantasy for their subject matter. As has been previously mentioned, *Comic Art* #7 inspired a whole new wave of interest in Carl Barks. One of Barks' biggest proponents was Michael Barrier, a long time fan of funny animal comics. He began his *Funnyworld* fanzine in the pages of *Capa-alpha* in 1966, then launched it in 1970 in a format similar to that of *Graphic Story Magazine*: slick, professionally-printed, well-written and heavily researched. #12, the first issue in the new offset format, headlined a lengthy, fascinating interview with Bob Clampett, the creator of Beany and Cecil and originator of Porky Pig. For a decade, *Funnyworld* was the place to be in comicdom if you were a fan of Disney comics or animation, or of Ralph Bakshi and the other "young turks" who emerged at the end of the decade.

Even *Star-Studded Comics*, long a bastion of the amateur super hero, began branching out in 1967 and 1968. While not as adventurous or disciplined as the material appearing in *GSM*, the added variety was in keeping with the times and tastes of the readers. "Personally, I would have stayed with just super heroes," Howard Keltner admitted, "but Larry and Buddy were growing up, and they wanted to try something different."

First there was "The Bloody Mary!," an sf/fantasy strip by Buddy Saunders in *SSC* #10. Then came a bizarre sf-type strip by Howard Waldrop and Saunders called "Till Time And Times Are Done," which seemed to be their attempt to out-Metzger Metzger. Veteran Steve Kelez's "King of the Hill!," set in Viet Nam, was one of the few war strips essayed for comicdom, and the team of Larry Herndon and Jim Starlin came up with the apocalyptic "Doomsday." Starlin also collaborated with Howard Keltner and others to produce a number of Dr. Weird comic strips, which appeared not only in *Star-Studded*, but also in *Fantastic Exploits* (a re-drawn origin story) and in *Dr. Weird*, his own magazine, for two issues.⁷

There were a couple of adaptations of note in *SSC*: Robert E. Howard's "Gods of the North" (which had originally been written as a Conan story) with art by Kelez and Hutchinson, and Gardner F. Fox's "Warrior of Llarn" adapted by Roy Thomas (before he turned pro) and illustrated by Sam Grainger.

Much of the better material in the later issues of *Star-Studded* was written and drawn by Alan Weiss.



Page from "Dragonfly" strip by Alan Weiss from Star-Studded Comics

Weiss had drawn a number of Doctor Weird strips for the Trio, and was a popular artist from the earliest days of comicdom. His two memorable western strips for SSC starring a laconic gunslinger named Buckskin Brown were a refreshing change of pace.

Although nominally in the super hero genre, Ronn Foss' Excel, Man of the Future, pushed the boundaries by bringing unmatched relevancy to the fan comic strip. Excel was a "thinking" robot endowed with laser-powers.

After being sent to break up a campus demonstration ("Siren Defeats Excel!", SSC #17, Summer 1971), he rebels against being used as a "tool of the establishment."

Having moved to the Bay Area in 1967, Ronn and Coreen Foss linked up with Steve and Louise Perrin who introduced them to the Society For Creative Anachronism which occupied much of their spare time for several years. They had two children, Alexandra and Scott (both now talented artists).

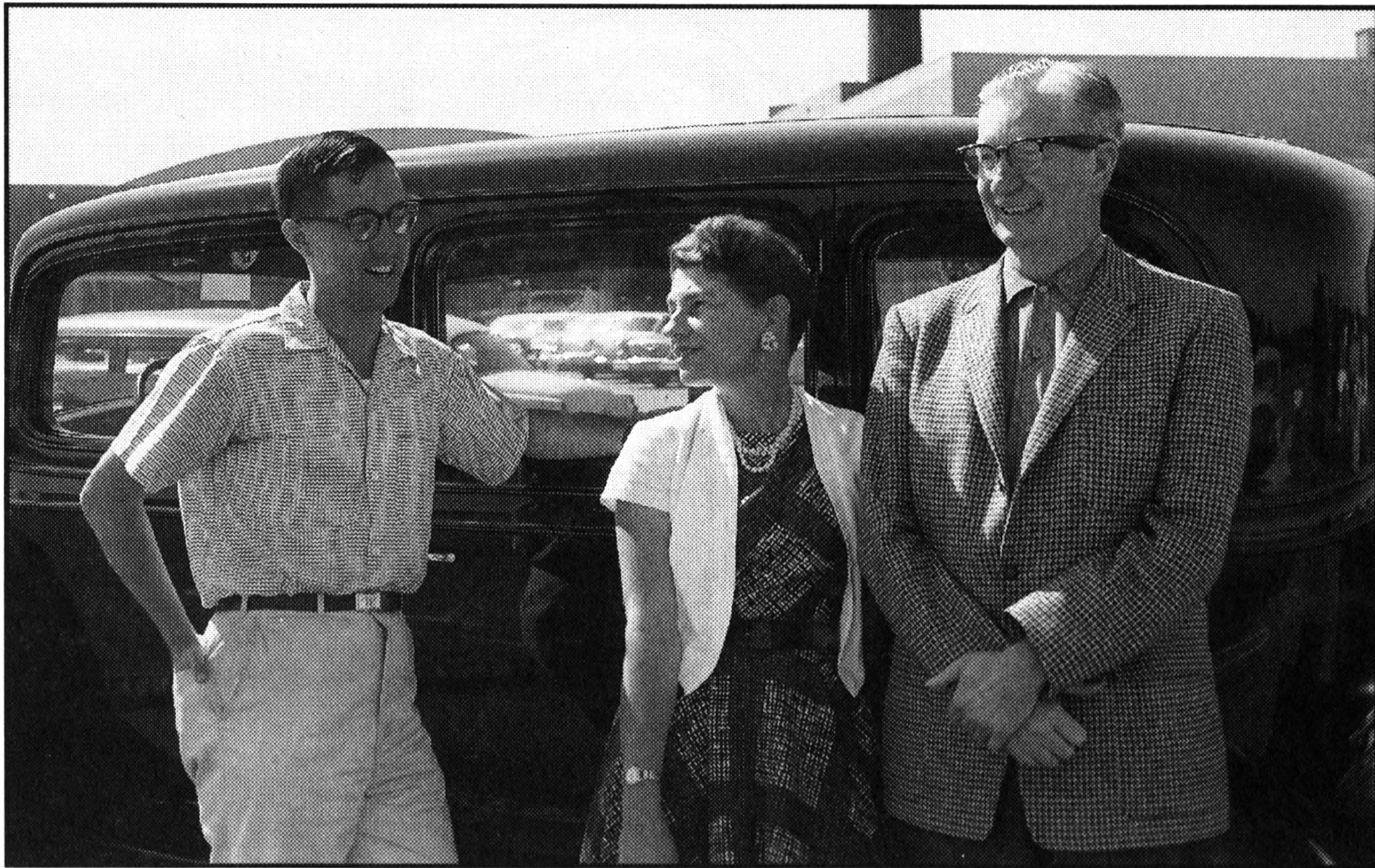
Although Ronn completed his only art assignment for Marvel during this period ("Valentines" for *Not Brand Ecch* #13), most of Foss' fannish art was limited to spot illustrations for the many photo offset fanzines that were proliferating.

Meanwhile, Ronn's buddy Grass Green had pushed his Xal-Kor, Human Cat to an unprecedented length in SSC #12 (Winter 1967), with a 28-page saga spanning the entire issue. After that, it seemed that his interest waned, and there were only a few more strips of this popular character (sometimes inked by Landon Chesney). Green had largely been oblivious to the development of the underground comix movement until Foss educated him on the subject. Before long, Grass was plotting his own (successful) entry into that field. He had found pro comics (with the exception of low-paying Charlton, where he drew *The Shape* and several humor features) largely unresponsive to his overtures.

The AcademyCon was the only summer convention in New York City in 1967, and though it was probably the biggest and best con yet, it was Dave Kaler's last as an organizer. (He continued to attend regularly as a dealer in future years.) "It just got too expensive and too much of a time-exhausting thing," he remembered, despite the help of Mark Hanerfeld and others. A year at the helm of the Academy was enough for him.

Still, as late as fall of 1967, Kaler began a column called "Fandom Speaks" that appeared in Charlton comics, sub-titled, "A monthly column of news and notes from the Academy of Comic Art Collectors." A laudable attempt to recruit more members for fandom, the full-page introductory piece carried Dave's mailing address at the bottom.

"I wanted to help out and keep it going because the Academy was a worthwhile idea, but you just couldn't find enough people to agree about *anything*," Kaler explained. "You just had too many



Above: The first fan photo of Carl Barks ever taken. Carl and his wife Gare stopped by to see Malcolm Willits at the University of Washington in Seattle on July 25, 1961. They are standing by Malcolm's 1932 V-12 Cadillac sedan, a classic car Willits still owns today. (Photo by Jim Gaylord.)

splinter groups and everybody wanted to do different things, and you can only take so much of that before you have to get out of it. Plus, the younger fans coming up didn't seem interested in comics *per se*, they were only interested in Stan Lee and Marvel, Marvel, Marvel. This really aggravated me, because I knew comics consisted of something more than Stan Lee and the Marvel line." Too, this was around the time that Dick Giordano left Charlton, and Kaler found the new management had other writers they wanted to use. He had done a lot of work for them, not just in *Captain Atom*, but for their war titles, their romance books, and even their hot-rod comics. Now, with the coming of the counter-culture, and a trend toward doing your own thing, he began to drift away from active involvement in fannish activities, to concentrate on dealing comics and other endeavors. (He did work with Sol Brodsky at Skywald on the short-lived *Heap* comic book.) In the 1970s, he and Bill Morse founded a store called Adventure Bound on Staten Island, and later he worked for Woody Gelman at Nostalgia Press and at Supersnipe in Manhattan.

Phil Seuling was the key organizer of the 1968 New York Comicon. A lifelong resident of Brooklyn, Seuling was a high school English teacher at Brooklyn's Lafayette High School. Phil had been involved in fandom from the beginning of the decade, had attended the New York cons since 1964, and moved to the forefront when Dave Kaler threw in the towel. Seuling headed a group of five (including New Englander Tom Fagan and French comics scholar Maurice Horn) who formed an organization called SCARP (the Society of Comic Art Research and Preservation) which would produce the 1968 New York Comicon. It would be the most ambitious comicon ever. For the first time, the event was held over the July 4th weekend, allowing an "extra day," for a total of four days of convention activity. (In 1972, the con lasted *five* days!) Benson and Pearson created the most elaborate program book yet, and established the Statler-Hilton Hotel as the con headquarters, which lasted for several years.

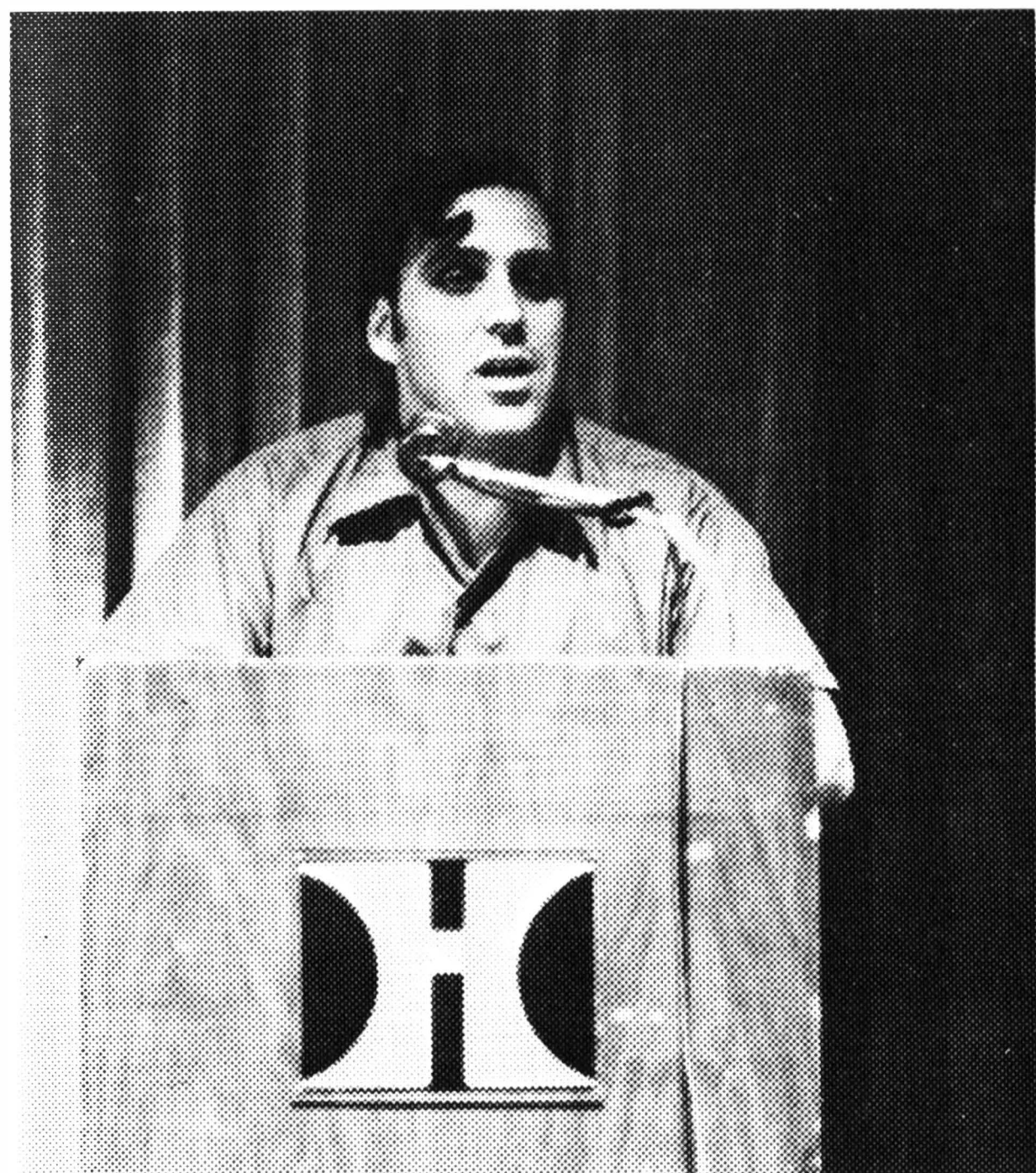
Well-known fan writer Dave Bibby wrote, "I was quite surprised to find that the 1968 comic convention was occupying the better part of the 18th floor of

the building. Upon entering the convention area, I could see why so great a space was required. After signing the roll, my mind was attacked by a visual bombardment of comic art. There were at least a dozen original drawings of comic book heroes and villains drawn by Gray Morrow, all of them beautiful. Nearby the handiwork of Jim Steranko was present, with drawings of characters he has conceived but have yet to appear in any media. One large room was devoted to exhibits of comic strip art, with artists like Hal Foster, Milton Caniff, Al Capp, Mort Walker, Leonard Starr, and many others represented, along with comic books under glass display cases."⁸

The 1968 SCARP Con began with Phil Seuling introducing Stan Lee to wild applause, and the programming never let up for the next four days, leaving the crowd of over seven hundred fans well-satisfied and worn-out by the events, dealing, and the general excitement of the first "international" convention. (Maurice Horn had flown across the Atlantic to attend. Because he and Phil clashed, SCARP as an organization became inactive after this single comicon.)



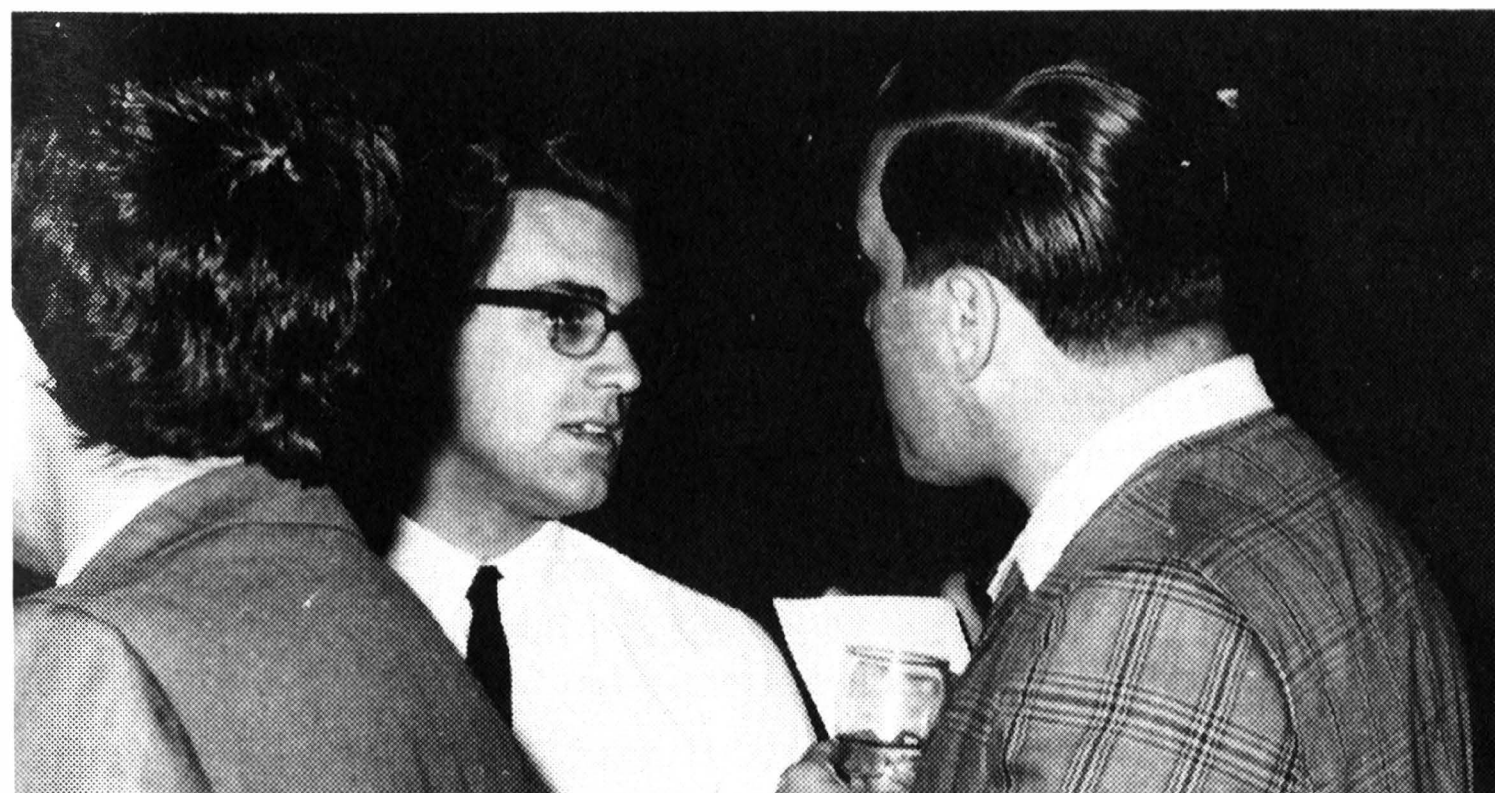
Archie Goodwin (with glasses and tie, left) and Al Williamson (also with tie, right) are flanked by fans at the 1968 New York SCARP Con. Center: Bob Schoenfeld, publisher of Gosh Wow! and On The Drawing Board.



Phil Seuling



Pros like Stan Lee were amazingly accessible at cons in the 1960s. (Standing behind Lee to the left is Wayne Howard, assistant to Wally Wood.)



John Benson chatting with Phil Seuling at the SCARP con cocktail party.



Bill Black with Marty Greim.

11

Coming of the Pro-Zines

The existence of fandom gave the necessary impetus to our faint hearts, and so we want to say to all you horny-handed, ink-stained editor-publishers, demon reviewers and wild-eyed mimeograph machinists, rustling out there in the underbrush ... You have shown us the way! We are eternally grateful ... unless we lose our shirts!"

Wally Wood, *Witzend* #1 (1966)

The origin of Wally Wood's magazine *Witzend* can be traced back to the late 1940s. "It is ... the culmination of a lot of futile fantasies which date back almost twenty years," Wood wrote in his first issue, "to student days at Hogarth's [Cartoonists and Illustrators School], when there was a lot of loose talk about pooling our meager resources and putting out a comic book as a sort of co-operative."¹ During the EC years in the early 1950s, Wally Wood, Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta and Roy Krenkel helped each other freely, with money the farthest things from their minds.

By the mid-1960s, however, they were acutely aware that others had profited greatly from their talents. Even EC had turned Kurtzman away when he wanted a piece of *Mad*, his creation. *Witzend* would be a way for these talented

artists to copyright and protect their ideas, as well as to judge fan reaction. While Wood and the others were realistic enough to know that this magazine would probably not make a lot of money (despite harboring fantasies that lightning might strike), perhaps the most popular ideas could be picked up by other publishers, who would be forced to allow the creators to retain ownership.

Witzend also had its roots in sf fandom, for it partly grew out of Dan Adkins' plan to publish something similar called *Outlet Science Fiction*—which, in a way, was a continuation of *Sata*, the fanzine Adkins had founded in 1956 and Bill Pearson had tended in the later issues. Adkins invited Wood to participate in *Outlet*, and when Dan found himself too busy with work at Marvel, Wood took over. Initially entitled *Et Cetera*, the title was changed at the last

possible moment when it was discovered that another publication was using that name.

Fandom greeted *Witzend* warmly, despite the \$1 price tag (the highest yet for a new fanzine, outside of the SFCA—in 1966, the top price was generally 75 cents). The first issue printed "Savage World!" with beautiful work by Al Williamson (assisted by Roy Krenkel and Frank Frazetta), "Animan" by Wally Wood, and material from Frank Frazetta, Archie Goodwin and others. Nothing innovative, to be sure, but extremely, well ... professional. Publisher Bill Pearson kept issues of *Witzend* coming with some regularity over the next several years.

If pros had been surprised and flattered by the attention paid them by fans, the members of comicdom in 1966 were flattered that pros would publish a

magazine aimed squarely at *them*. In a certain sense, *Witzend* marked the first hint that a "direct market to fans" was an option. To paraphrase Wood, comic fandom had "shown him the way."

Until then, established pros had rarely appeared in the pages of fanzines. Of course, there were exceptions: Otto Binder contributed material, in one form or another, to *Xero*, *Fantasy Illustrated*, *Alter Ego* and *Fighting Hero Comics*. Steve Ditko's art popped up in *Yancy Street Journal*, *The Comic Reader*, *All-Stars* #1 and *Alter Ego*.

John Benson had interviewed Harvey Kurtzman for *Spoof* #4 (August 1958) and his own fanzine called *Image*, in both #1 (1960) and #5 (Winter 1962), but the first really lengthy interview was *Talk with B. Krigstein* (ca. August 1963). That interview, conducted by Benson and Bhub Stewart, was twenty-eight pages long.

Most fanzine editors, however, initially found it difficult to get in-depth interviews with pro writers and artists. At its most absurd level, a number of zines in the early 1960s published interviews with Stan Lee where Lee gave little more than "yes" or "no" answers. Ronn Foss' interview with Joe Kubert in *AE* #6 (April 1964) was somewhat extensive; Len Wein's talk with Jack Kirby in Mike Vosburg's *Masquerader* #6 (Spring 1964) was quite brief. Input by pros in the early days of comicdom usually amounted to an occasional letter or a quick sketch.

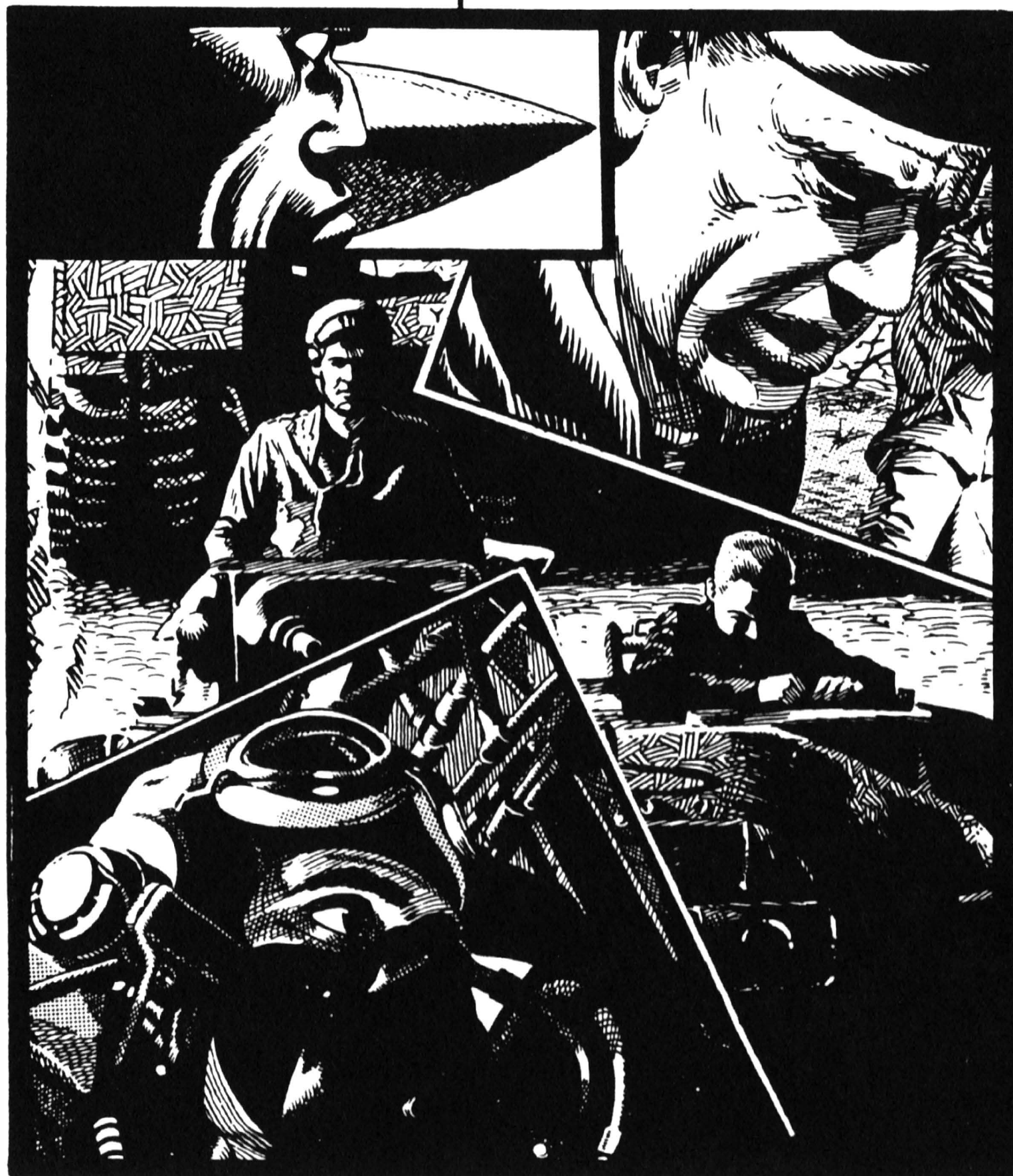
Witzend seemed to precipitate a thaw. Gradually, pros began digging into their files for unpublished material, and with increasing frequency such material found its way into the hands of fanzine publishers. A series of slick, thick and high-priced fanzines began to emerge in 1969 and 1970 with one major calling card: irresistible art by pros and near-pros.

One of the first and most impressive was *Squa Tront*. Jerry Weist of Wichita, Kansas, published his first issue in 1968 with the full cooperation of Bill Gaines and the former EC staff. The second issue (for just 75 cents) boasted a full color front cover by Williamson, a back cover by Reed Crandall, and material by top fan

PHOTO-OFFSET · 52 PAGES · 8 1/2 BY 11 · COLOR COVERS
SCIENCE FICTION · FANTASY · HORROR · AIRPLANE TALES
ART BY PROFESSIONALS · MAILED IN STURDY ENVELOPE

OUTLET S-F COMICS

DAN ADKINS
ROBERT ADRAGNA
JACK GAUGHAN
RICHARD BASSFORD
DICK JONES



From Outlet S-F Comics to

artists Berni Wrightson and George Metzger. In 1969, *Squa Tront* just got better, publishing never-before-seen EC material. After a hiatus, the fanzine passed to publisher/editor John Benson in the mid-seventies, who brought it to an even higher level of quality and intelligence. Chocked full of rare artwork and lengthy interviews, *Squa Tront* was a dream-come-true for EC fans.

In *ST* #5 through 9, Benson ran a series of fascinating articles on the EC fanzines of the 1950s. He had been involved in EC fandom, contributing to *Hoohah!*, *Concept* and others. His long Krigstein interview established Benson as an interview specialist of uncommon ability; his subsequent

lengthy interview with Harvey Kurtzman cemented the fact. (The Kurtzman interview was conducted in August 1965, but didn't appear until Spring 1966.) His conversation with Will Eisner in *Witzend* #6 (Spring 1969) set the standard for further interviews with the creator of the Spirit.

Alter Ego re-surfaced in 1970, now totally a product of professionals like editor/publisher Roy Thomas, Gil Kane, Joe Kubert, Marie Severin and others. (The ads, which ran in Marvel Comics, blared, "*Alter Ego* goes pro!!") Thomas had been promising *AE* #10 since 1966, and fans were greeting his annual assurances of publication with

WOOD HAS DONE IT!



Done what? Published a magazine! And lined up the following contributors:

**WILLIAMSON
GAUGHAN
CRANDALL
GOODWIN
FRAZETTA
ADKINS
MORROW
TORRES
*et cetera***

By the way, that's the name of it..

et cetera

It is a full-sized 8½ by 11, offset magazine, and has the most flexible format possible... Science Fiction, Fantasy, Adventure, Monsters, Super Heroes, Satire,

et cetera

The price is \$1.00 per copy... send orders to

**WALLACE WOOD
ET CETERA
POST OFFICE BOX NO.882
ANSONIA STATION
N.Y., N.Y. 10023**

...et cetera ... to Witzend!

either bemusement or outrage. But Roy eventually came through with an issue that was worth the wait.

The highlight was John Benson's lengthy talk with Gil Kane, one of the most interesting interviews ever printed in a fanzine. Benson, as usual, was well-prepared and asked thoughtful questions, but he had an unusually articulate and perceptive subject in Gil Kane. Fans who had heard Gil speak on panels at comicons knew what Benson and Thomas now shared with the world: that Kane had a keen understanding of the graphic story medium.

Kane proved to have uncanny foresight. Toward the end of the

interview, Gil opined, "I believe that there are going to be all shapes and sizes and price ranges in comics. A sophisticated form is still awaiting a Kurtzman or someone to come in and articulate it, and amplify it. I also feel that the economic set-up will be different, that there will be a different return to the creator. Because right now he is a factory hand and he only draws the wages of a factory hand, and until he gets to control his product he can't expect to get a better slice of whatever is coming in. The focus will be thrown on the people who create comics; and those who create it best are the people who are going to be in the new position of power."

Unfortunately, pro commitments prevented Roy Thomas from producing further issues of *AE* until 1978 when Mike Friedrich offered to become its new publisher. The keystones of *Alter Ego* #11 were interviews with Bill Everett and Jean (Moebius) Giraud. That was to be the last fandom would see of the *AE* name for twenty years, with the exception of a First Comics mini-series created by Thomas and artist Ron Harris in 1986.

Most of the "pro-zines" (fanzines that consisted primarily of work by professional artists and writers) were edited and published by fans. These included *Phase*, *Seraphim*, *This is Legend*, *Eon*, *Anomaly*, *Reality*, *I'll Be Damned*, *Heritage*, *Infinity*, and a number of others. Rich Hauser, Helmut Mueller and friends put out *Spa Fon*, not strictly an EC fanzine like *Squa Tront*, but offering its share of rare artwork by Frazetta, Crandall, Krenkel etc. *Phase* #1 (the only issue), which sold for a then-staggering \$5, featured 84 pages of stories by Neal Adams, Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta and Gray Morrow. In some ways, it was the epitome of the pro-zine.

Even the "true" fanzines lusted after pro work, and published as much of it as possible. Magazines like *The Collector*, *Sense of Wonder*, *Fantastic Fanzine* and *Comic Crusader* always devoted a portion of their contents to pro works, or fan-artists who had gained followings, like John Fantucchio, Robert Kline, Richard Corben, Kenneth Smith, Don Newton and Berni Wrightson. Fan-eds realized that pro and near-pro names sold a lot of copies, and this was necessary to break even with the rising cost of photo-offset printing.

Rob and Jeff Gluckson published *Guts*, *The Magazine With Intestinal Fortitude*. "[*Guts*] was ditto for the first three issues," Rob wrote recently. "We were hot to increase our circulation so we could go offset. We were in contact with top professionals, and in the course of our dealings, located fine artwork." *Guts* published art by George Barr, Craig Robertson, Tim Kirk, Roy G. Krenkel, Steve Ditko and Harvey Kurtzman. "We interviewed Ray Bradbury, Bob

Kane ... and Forrest J. Ackerman. The problem was that as we got more professional, we used less and less of our own work. Who wanted to read articles by fifteen-year-olds when they could read the words of the creators they admired? It took a lot of the fun out of producing the zines."

The Steranko History of Comics (1970) was a for-profit project marketed to comicdom by an established professional. It had originally been proposed to Marvel by Steranko as *Stan Lee's History of Comics*, but when Steranko had broken with Marvel, he re-titled the book and used it to launch his Supergraphics company.

At the 1971 New York Comicon, when receiving a Comic Art award, Jim Steranko described how the project evolved. "I collected many fanzines and I browsed through my comic collection," Steranko recounted. "I talked to a friend of mine and I gave him the complete format of the book on little playing card reproductions which broke it down into what I told him. I gave him all the fanzines and he wrote me an outline based on those fanzine articles. Full of misinformation. I took that outline and talked to people connected to the industry.... The entire book was written in long hand. Putting together that book, collecting the facts and verifying it, was quite a task."² Fans later felt that Steranko should have done more fact-checking, yet no one would deny the importance of this ground-breaking two volume history. (Unfortunately, further volumes failed to materialize.)

Steranko decided that Supergraphics should also publish a newsletter that would not only keep fandom abreast of events in the comics industry, but would publicize his projects. He contacted Gary Brown, editor/publisher of news-zine *Comic Comments*, and proposed continuing *CC* in a totally professional bi-monthly format, under the name *Comixscene*. Brown accepted the offer, became editor of the new Supergraphics publication, and announced the news in *Comic Comments* #28 (December 1971), the last issue to be published out of Florida. *Comixscene* debuted after the first of the year; before long, the

title was changed to *Mediascene*, to encompass a larger audience.

In 1971, *Kirby Unleashed* was one of the most successful professionally-published portfolios. Without the necessity of articles, promoters and high-rollers found that all it took to market to comicdom was some venture capital and a deal with a prominent artist. Special color prints, posters and portfolios became increasingly popular around this time, with Frazetta the ultimate star attraction.

At the same time pro-zines came into prominence, reprinted work from the 1940s was increasingly available. Before Jules Feiffer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes* offered those first glorious color reprints in late 1965, old-time dealer and collector of newspaper comic strips Edwin Aprill Jr. was planning his own set of pioneering reprints. *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* was the first in what would become his "Great Classic Newspaper Comic Strips" (GCNCS) series. Although expensive (\$5 for sixty-eight pages), Aprill's books filled an important niche. He followed up his Buck Rogers volumes with two devoted to the Spirit daily strips. Aficionados of newspaper strips were delighted, and the GCNCS series inspired the publication of *The Menominee Falls Gazette* and *Vintage Funnies*, which regularly offered a selection of different strips in sequence, beginning in late 1971.

Captain George Henderson, of Toronto, Canada, also reprinted comic strips in his Whizzbang Publications. *Capt. George's Comic World* (subsequently re-named *Capt. George Presents*) was mainly about comics, and *The New Capt. George's Whizzbang* was crammed with material about movies, serials, radio, the pulps and much more.

Another important source of reprinted comic art was Woody Gelman's Nostalgia Press. Gelman (who had written funny animal comics for DC) began advertising Nostalgia Press in mid-1970, and soon fielded a wide-ranging assortment of cartoon collections, newspaper strip reprints and even underground comix (in addition to his other general-interest nostalgia books). His catalog sported a cover by Robert Crumb. Perhaps the most

high-profile endeavor from Nostalgia Press was *The EC Horror Library* (1972), a hardbound collection of twenty-three EC stories in full color, shot from the original art. Here was a perfect opportunity to sample some of the best yarns from EC's New Trend horror titles.

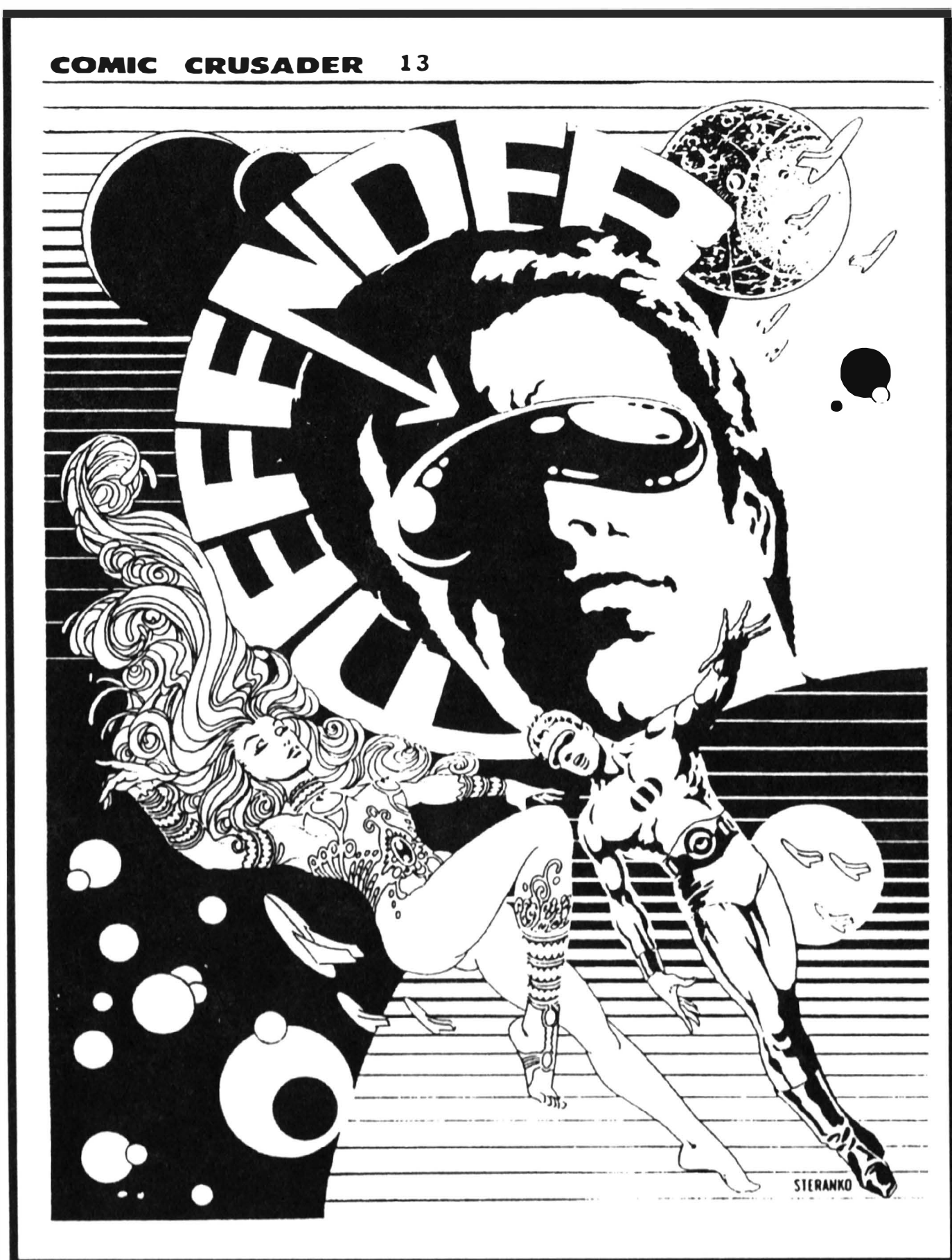
That the inundation of slick magazines and books full of work by professionals inevitably drew the comic fans' discretionary dollars is completely understandable. Despite the many fanzine review columns rating the latest zines (in *The Comic Reader*, *RB-CC* and *George*), there were many crud-zines out there, and it didn't take long for a fan on a limited budget to realize how easy it was to get burned. Thus, fans looked for insurance: well-known contributors who could be counted on to produce material of a certain quality. No one qualified as "well-known" better than the pros who had built-in name recognition.

A 1969 ad for Jan Strnad's *Anomaly* began, "In today's world of myriad offset crudzines, offset printing is no longer a mark of distinction—it's simply a way to charge fifty cents to a dollar for the same old 15 cent crud. So we've made sure that *Anomaly* contains ... professional work by Reed Crandall, Harlan Ellison and Archie Goodwin."³

This new breed of pro-zines was like manna from heaven for fans appreciative of uncensored work by their favorites, or reprints of rare comics. Who but the sourest of sourpusses could complain about this embarrassment of riches?

But whenever something is gained, something else is surely lost. In this case, two things (hardly noticed at the time) *were* lost. The first was well-written articles, which suddenly became in short supply.

The pro-zines were focused mainly on artwork, portfolios and unpublished strips. When they had text at all, it tended to be interviews with pros. Intelligent articles of the sort that had been found in the pages of *Alter Ego*, *Comic Art* and *Xero*, or even in the pages of the "middle brow" *Yancy Street Journal* and *Batmania*, became an endangered species. About the only time something approaching an article was used was to accompany

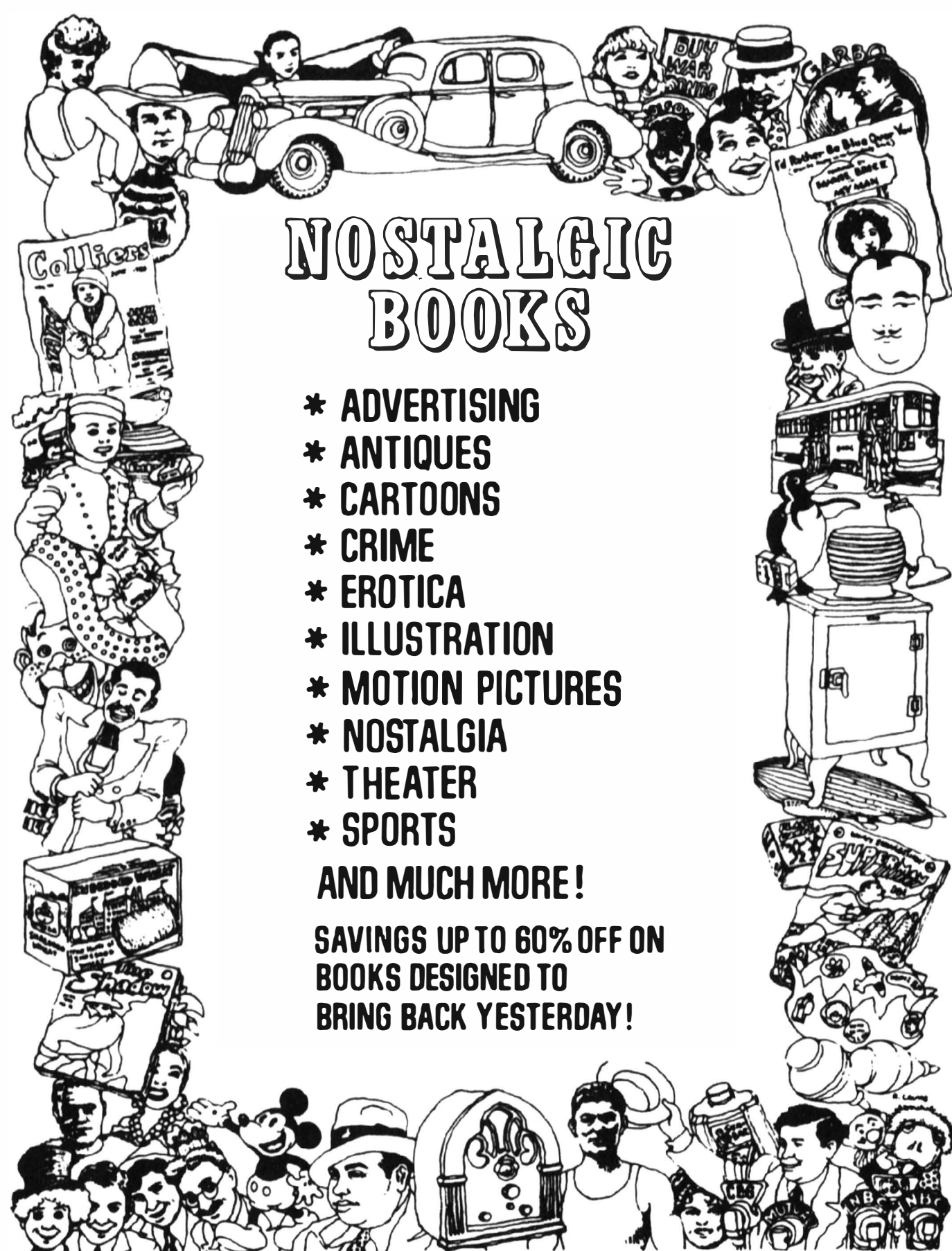


Jim Steranko's psychedelic cover featuring Martin Greim's "David Manning - The Defender" hero.



Introducing . . . Captain Infinity!

Harper and Kaluta (from Graphic Showcase)



The cover of this early Nostalgia Press catalog is a rather uncharacteristic piece by R. Crumb.

ONE DOLLAR JULY - AUGUST 1973 SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE NO.5

COMIXSCENE

COMICS · FILMS · PAPERBACKS · UNDERGROUNDS · TV · PULPS



Cover by Jack Kirby

art by a contributing pro, and this was increasingly rare. Many fans found themselves glancing admiringly at beautiful drawings, but becoming somehow uninvolved with the fanzine itself—perhaps because the "editors" themselves were essentially traffic cops, controlling the flow of pin-ups and "rare" sketches which were no better than the work in the pro comics—and in black and white.

Not that there weren't exceptions. Marty Greim's *Comic Crusader*, in particular, kept the text ratio high, with excellent pieces like Tom Fagan's study of Airboy in *CC* #4 through 6, and an article on the 1969 annual Rutland Halloween Parade in *CC* #8. (Greim did not print just pro art—he included able work from Bob Cosgrove, Al Bradford, Anthony Kowalik and other talented fans.)

Robert Jennings brought *Comic World* back in 1969, after serving a stint in the military; though now printed photo-offset, the new *CW* carried on its tradition of running long pieces. In this incarnation, Jennings published articles on Blackhawk, the Golden-Age Daredevil, the Black Terror, the Blue Beetle and many others.

Graphic Story Magazine was another major exception. Maybe editor/publisher Bill Spicer recognized that few were offering substantive articles any more; or, perhaps he simply realized that trying to break new graphic story ground with a limited pool of fan talent was a losing game. Whatever the case, *GSM* shifted its focus to a series of in-depth studies of professional artists and writers—a sort of extension of the "Graphic Story Review." #8 had an excellent piece of Charles Biro's *Topps* magazine. The lengthy interview with Alex Toth in #10 captured the brilliant mind of the man. #13 gave us a close look at John Severin, and two full issues were devoted to the art of Basil Wolverton. *GSM* #11 examined the work of Will Gould, an artist unknown to many fans; it did such a brilliant job tracing the man's career that many *GSM* readers became immediate fans of his "Red Barry" comic strip. These features often centered on unusually probing and well-edited interviews, and are in a class by themselves.

By considering the innovators and rebels of the past, Spicer generally avoided the pitfall of spending his time and energy promoting the trendy artists of the day. He gave us something not just for the eyes, but for the mind.

The second thing that was lost when fans shifted their buying power (almost overnight) to the pro-zines was a quality that is known as "fannishness." The definition of fannish is "that which pertains to fans." A fanzine was considered to have a "fannish" orientation if its main concern were the doings of members of fandom—rather than the reigning pros of the day.

A number of comic fanzines had been centered wholly around the denizens of the subculture. One of the earliest was Ronn Foss' *Dateline: Comicdom*, which was a "friend-zine" available only to fanzine publishers or prominent writers and artists, mainly amateurs. Its goal was to facilitate communication among the publishers by establishing a wire service for comicdom. Foss' main concern was what fan editors thought of the various issues confronting fandom at the time: the increasing number of crud-zines, the possibility of a comicon, etc. Begun in August 1963, it continued for several years after Foss gave it up. Another early zine of a strictly fannish nature was Johnny Chambers' *FANtastic*. In the late 1960s, Mike Raub's *Fandom Calling* and Doug Fratz' *CriFanAc* filled this need. And Don and Maggie's *Newfangles* (1967 to 1970) was the epitome of fannishness.

Of course, the ama-strip fanzines were essentially fannish in nature, for they were strictly concerned with the creations of amateur writers and artists.

Fannishness, by extension, was inextricably linked to the concept of non-profit enterprise. Fandom was not a way to make money, it was a way to enhance one's enjoyment of the hobby. While there had always been dealers, and fans certainly came in different stripes, the earliest days of comicdom were mainly a time of innocent enjoyment of the camaraderie of fellow comic collectors. So great was fans'

delight in discovering this unexpected brotherhood that it was considered unseemly to try to make money from one's friends—at least, on fanzines. This highly personal aspect of fandom, which had at its heart the spirit of the amateur, and was responsible for getting comicdom off the ground, gradually seemed to seep away by the decade's end. Not so much among fans themselves, but in the pages of the magazines that everyone was buying.

In the early days when the number of super hero comics on the stands was limited, fans who wanted more comics to read eagerly turned to the ama-strip fanzines like *Star-Studded Comics*. They embraced the works of talents like Ronn Foss, Biljo White, Grass Green, Roger Brand, Landon Chesney and many, many more. They followed the work of the later generation, too, made up of Rich Buckler, Alan Hutchinson, Martin Greim, Alan Hanley and William Black. But how could these gentlemen's work compete with the new Mr. A installment by Ditko (and they seemed to be everywhere); or, a heretofore unpublished EC strip by Williamson? Or beautiful black and white reprints of Kubert's Tor?

Something else had changed. An increasing number of fan artists began to make the leap into pro comics by the decade's end. Or they had moved into the world of underground comix. The heyday of the ama-strip zines was over.

But more changes were in the wind. And one of them was to profoundly change the hobby of comic book collecting itself: the first major price guide for comic fandom.

Footnotes - Chapter 11

¹Wally Wood, editorial, *Witzend* #1, 1966.

²Jeff Wasserman and Bob Zimmerman (transcribers), "Awards Luncheon" account, *Fantastic Fanzine Special* #2, February 1972.

³Jan Strnad, ad for *Anomaly*, *RB-CC* #66, 1969.

12

Brave New Comicdom

Before [the publication of Overstreet's The Comic Book Price Guide], want lists were filled with question marks. After its publication, people knew what they were collecting and the budget they should set aside for it. It changed the world of comics collecting."

Don and Maggie Thompson¹

In pro comics, 1970 will be remembered as the year that Mort Weisinger retired, and Jack Kirby stunned fandom by moving from Marvel to DC.

In the history of comicdom, 1970 will be remembered as the year the first *Comic Book Price Guide* by Bob Overstreet appeared. Its seismic effect on collecting comics would overshadow other major developments of the year, like the release of *The Steranko History of Comics*, the debut of Marvel's *Conan The Barbarian* by Roy Thomas and Barry Smith, or Arlington House's *All In Color For A Dime* hardback, edited by Dick Lupoff and Don Thompson.

One of the main reasons fans flocked to comic fandom in 1961 was to trade not just comics, but *information about comics* among themselves. Fans with an indexing

bent devoted untold hours gathering data into the first lists, like Fred von Bernewitz' *Complete EC Checklist*, Jerry Bails' *All-Star* and DC indexes, Don and Maggie Thompson's *Dell Special Number Series* list, the McGeehan brothers' many House of Info checklists, and (later) Michelle Nolan's Golden Age indexes. The next obvious step was for the indexes to be pulled together into a comprehensive list of all comic books—but the task was of an enormity only an inveterate indexer could appreciate.

"If you've never done such a thing, you have no idea of the problems that can arise in any indexing—the massive quantity of sheer *time* it takes to produce a usable bulk of correct information," the Thompsons wrote in 1980. "We saw the huge notebook Jerry Bails carried to each convention, filled

with comic titles and prices and annotations...."¹ For Bill Spicer and Jerry Bails' *Guidebook To Comics Fandom*, only a four-page list of comic books published before 1946 was included, citing the dates of the first and the last known issues.

Who would create the Ultimate Index?

In 1965, the automatic response might have been the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors, but it still came down to the matter of which fan (or group of fans) was willing and able to shoulder the responsibility. By 1968, the Academy was in its death throes, and soon such an important (and relatively easy) function as conducting the annual Alley Award poll would cease. (1969 was the last year for the Alleys. *Fantastic Four* was Best Adventure Title, Dick Giordano was Best Editor, Roy

Thomas was Best Writer and Neal Adams was Best Pencil Artist. Starting in 1970, the Thompsons began conducting their own version of the Alley Awards called the Goethe, or Comic Art, Awards.)

In truth, Bails himself had conceived such a project early on, and had been working on it over the years. At the round table discussion which ended the 1964 Alley Tally Party at his home, Bails had discussed the need for an all-encompassing index, and also introduced the idea that such an index *could be the basis for a comic book price guide*. But Jerry's heart was not in the daunting task of assigning comic book values, and even if he could publish such a price guide, who would take on the endeavor of publishing updated and corrected editions as they became necessary?

Then, out of the blue, he heard from Bob Overstreet. Bails recently wrote, "Without knowing anything about my work on a price guide, Bob contacted me. I don't recall if he asked for my help or was just announcing his plans, but I was happy to turn over what I'd done, because I had other projects that interested me more. He was delighted to accept my help, but he took the ball and ran with it. I think he did a remarkably fine job."

Bob Overstreet was not a Big Name Fan, though he was known in fannish circles for his artwork in Bill Spicer's *Fantasy Illustrated* #3. Landon Chesney remembered, "Like Grass Green and Ronn Foss, Bob and I became friends in grammar school (circa 1951). We both started collecting EC's about the same time, but, beyond that, I was attracted by Bob's scientific bent. He had a sophistication ... that was unusual in a guy of grammar school age."

Bob had been collecting comics since 1952, and by the late 1960s, began to see a need for a comic book price guide.

Overstreet explained, "Back in the 1950s I used to be in coins, and I remember the impact *Yeoman's Red Book* had on me and how it helped me to learn the market. Using that as a model, I typed up some rough ideas of what I thought a price guide for comics should look like. I went to Bob Jennings, who was publishing *Comic World* in Nashville, and asked him if he thought it would be

a good idea. I tried to talk him into putting it out, since he was already publishing fanzines and had some experience.

"Well, Bob didn't think it was a good idea. He didn't think it would work. So I went to Jerry Bails. Bails said that he didn't have the time to do it, but he would help me if I needed it. That gave me the impetus to go ahead and do it.

"I had price lists from practically every dealer from the early 1960s, Rogofsky's, Claude Held's, and all the *RB-CC* issues. So I went through everything I had, compiling a list of titles. Bails had just published his *Collector's Guide to the First Heroic Age*, which listed all the Golden Age heroes and which comics they appeared in, and which proved to be a tremendous source of information. Probably the *Price Guide* wouldn't have been possible if Bails hadn't published that source book.

"But he only listed the 1940s hero comics. The 1930s stuff, the romance comics, everything from the late 1940s up, the funny animals, I had to pick up myself. I pulled all this information out of all the dealer lists that I had. That's what went into the initial *Price Guide*."²

If fans had some idea what a comic was selling for across the country, then they would be less likely to buy a grossly-overpriced book. At the time, it seems certain that neither Bails or Overstreet realized the furor that would inevitably surround such a project.

Bails, whose name offered the ultimate in fan prestige, would be Associate Editor of the 1970 edition. The editorial material from the *Guidebook To Comics Fandom* (written by Bails) under the umbrella title "America's Four-Color Pastime" was incorporated into the new Guide, with the blessing of Bails and Spicer. One significant advance was the addition of the grading category "Fine (FN)" between "Mint" and "Very Good." ("Near Mint" was added to the 1972 *Price Guide* grading definitions.)

The first edition of *The Comic Book Price Guide* (November 1970) had 218 pages of listings, and a total of 244 printed pages, from cover to cover. It was digest sized, with wrap-around saddle-stitched binding (quite awkward, for the

number of pages) and sold for \$5 per copy. (The pre-publication price was \$3.50.)

Overstreet's introduction read, in part, "The comic book market from the early to the late 1960s was very unstable. Prices were increasing so rapidly in all categories, during that period, that the debut of a Price Guide was impractical. However, the market seems to have stabilized over the past two years, making it now possible to have a realistic, dependable Price Guide.

"In the past there has been a lot of confusion as to pricing books by condition. It is my sincere hope that the Price Guide will help in this regard.

"Everyone connected with the publication of this book advocates the collecting of comic books for fun and pleasure, as well as nostalgia, art, and cultural values. Second to this is investment, which, if wisely placed in the best quality books ... will yield dividends over the long term."³ The words "investment" and "dividends" did not go unnoticed, though it's likely they were carryovers from other price guides that Overstreet was imitating.

The first edition of the *Price Guide* was not complete or without errors (quite the opposite). But, as an index, it was a tremendous achievement. The guide sold like wildfire, and it was soon apparent that the demand would be sufficient for periodically updated editions. The first edition was reprinted in 1971 with only the color of the cover (blue) changed. In the coming years, the number of pages dedicated to listings increased continually. Overstreet turned out to be a remarkably reliable publisher, and one who was committed to the essential task of maintaining and improving the data in the guide.

Of course, Bob Overstreet had no control over the way the information in the guide would be used. In the hands of the unsophisticated (or unscrupulous) reader, the "mint" price was often quoted—despite the actual condition of the comic book in question. And it meant that even "the little kid down the block" would have a way to assign a value to the stack of comics that his parents had saved through the years. Opportunities for windfall deals began to evaporate. Also, the guide made it easier for anyone to become

THE COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE



1ST EDITION

1933 - PRESENT



\$5.00 © 1970 BY ROBERT M. OVERSTREET

THE COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE

BOOKS FROM 1933 - PRESENT INCLUDED

CATALOGUE AND PRICE LIST — ILLUSTRATED

ROBERT M. OVERSTREET
PUBLISHING EDITOR

JERRY G. BAILS
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

* CONTENTS *

- * A Brief History of Comic Books and Comics Fandom
- * How to Collect Comic Books
- * How to Condition Comic Books
- * Newspaper Reprint Comics of the 1930's
- * The First Heroic Age of the late 1930's and 1940's
- * The Funny Animal, Love, Western, and War era of the late 1940's and early 1950's
- * The Crime, Horror, and Science Fiction era of the early 1950's
- * The Second Heroic Age of the late 1950's and 1960's

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ACTION COMICS

June, 1938 - Present

National Periodical Publications

Issue #	Good	Fine	Mint
1-Origin Superman, Intro. Zatar.	200.00	250.00	300.00
2	50.00	60.00	70.00
3	40.00	50.00	65.00
4	35.00	45.00	55.00
5	30.00	35.00	45.00
6,8,9	25.00	30.00	35.00
7,10-Superman covers.	30.00	35.00	40.00
11,12,14,16,18-16.00	20.00	25.00	30.00
13,15,17,19,20-Superman covers.	20.00	25.00	30.00
21,22	16.00	20.00	23.00
23-First Luthor & Black Pirate.	16.00	20.00	23.00
24-30	15.00	17.50	20.00
31,32	12.50	15.00	17.50
33-Origin Mr. America.	14.00	17.00	19.00
34-40	12.50	15.00	17.50
41	12.50	15.00	17.50
42-Origin Vigilante; Bob Daley becomes Fatman.	12.50	15.00	17.50
43-50-Intro. Billy Gun #43; Intro. Stuff #45.	8.00	10.00	12.00
51	7.00	8.00	10.00
52-Fatman & Mr. America become the Americommandos. Origin of Vigilante retold.	7.00	8.00	10.00
53-60	7.00	8.00	10.00
61-70	6.00	7.00	8.00
71-80-#74 last Mr. America.	5.00	6.00	7.00

Issue #	Good	Fine	Mint
291-340	.25	.35	.45
Action Comics #334	.75	1.00	1.25

ed New Comics
ons, Inc.

Int
0.00
5.00
6.00
30.00
begins in
20.00
17.50
15.00

50 75.00
50 35.00

50.00



Action Comics #25

© National Periodical Publ.

Issue #	Good	Fine	Mint
78-80	20.00	22.50	25.00
81,82-Last S&K Sandman.	20.00	22.50	25.00
83-90-#83 last Hourman.	15.00	17.50	20.00
91-100-#92 last Manhunter.	10.00	12.50	15.00
101,102-Last Starman & Sandman.	8.00	9.00	10.00
Starman, Johnny Quick, Superboy	6.00	7.00	8.00
Intro.	3.00	4.00	5.00
	2.00	3.00	4.00
	1.50	2.00	2.50
	1.50	2.00	2.50
	1.50	2.00	2.50
155,157,159,161,163-night by Frazetta.	3.00	4.00	5.00

Bob Overstreet



Shel Dorf, pictured below from a newspaper photo, designed the logo for San Diego's Golden State Comicon.



—Staff Photo by John Price

a dealer (instead of active researchers who loved and appreciated the books).

Both collectors *and* dealers seemed to have a love-hate relationship with the guide. Ironically, though Overstreet had waited until the market seemed to have stabilized, the publication of the guide probably had the effect of pushing prices upward.

Some fans suspected that dealers might be less than honest in their reports to Overstreet, for they could only benefit from higher prices. What fans forgot was that higher prices in the guide meant that dealers would have to pay more to *replace* items. While there might be some short term profit-taking, the law of supply and demand would, eventually, ensure the realism of the prices.

Without a responsible and credible price guide, comics could never become a legitimate collectible. How could insurance companies consider insuring them, if there was no standard that an independent appraiser could use to assign values? Yes, the guide ultimately resulted in investors and people with no particular love of comics buying them like stocks—but this happens to all collectibles. Comics could still be worth no more than someone was willing to pay for them.

What were some of the prices listed in that first edition of the guide? *Action* #1 was \$250 in "Fine" condition ... *Amazing Fantasy* #15 came in at \$16 in "Mint" ... *X-Men* #1 was \$6.00 ... and so on.³ In retrospect, even considering inflation, the anti-Overstreet element now seems a little on the hysterical side. The prices *were* higher than they had been, but hardly unrealistic at the time.

Nevertheless, Jerry Bails wrote, "I was really not interested in publishing the price guide, beyond helping get it started—and I came to regret even that. It meant a loss of innocence for fandom. Speculators with no interest in the comics themselves came out of the woodwork, and prices starting soaring."

Preparations for a completely revised second edition went forward. This time the guide was offered in both a softcover and hardcover version, for \$6 or \$10 a copy, respectively. It had grown to 334 pages, with over 550 halftones of comic covers.

"I sold about 1,800 copies of the first edition, give or take a couple of hundred," Overstreet recalled. "The second edition doubled that, selling about 3,800 copies altogether. With the third edition, the book was professionally bound for the first time, and the circulation doubled again." By the sixth edition in the late 1970s, the print run had soared to 41,000 copies.²

1970 saw another event of great significance: the first San Diego Comicon. It was started by the Chairman of the first Detroit Triple Fan Fair, Shel Dorf. Shel had moved to New York in 1967 to pursue his art career, but by 1969 he was living in San Diego, and helping to organize the push for an actual comicon in that city.

"I was bored out of my gourd," he recalled, "and they had a lot of science fiction conventions around San Diego, but no comic conventions. So I started the San Diego Comicon." Dorf, Richard Alf, Ken Krueger and others pondered the possibility, but the hotels required money up front, and they had little.

Then they got a break. "I went to the visitor's convention bureau, and I met a guy who was really

helpful," Dorf said. "He suggested that we plan *two* conventions. The first would be a one-day thing, with a three day con to be held later on. This fellow said that if we promised a hotel that we would give them the three day convention, they'd give us the space for the one-day mini-con for nothing. A very clever arrangement!"

The first San Diego mini-con was held on March 21, 1970, and its success was largely due to the support of Forrest J. Ackerman. Ackerman was Special Guest of Honor. His fame brought in followers of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. When asked how he was able to persuade a big name like Forrey to attend a little mini-con, Dorf replied, "He had a lot of firsts to his career, and I asked him 'would you attend the *first comicon in San Diego* as our special guest?' He accepted, and paid for it out of his own pocket, too. It was Forrey Ackerman's fame that actually put us on the map and started the San Diego comicon off." By putting on the one day mini-con, the committee was able to raise enough money to print fliers and to line-up the three day convention.

San Diego's Golden State Comic-Con (as it was first known) was held August 1 - 3, 1970, at the US Grant Hotel. Two of the most illustrious guests were Jack Kirby and Ray Bradbury. The program booklet boasted a beautiful two-color Kirby cover, a caricature of Bradbury by Caniff, and numerous sketches by Marvel and DC pros. While no one knew at the time, the San Diego Comicon would go on to become the premiere West Coast comicon, and then the leading comicon in the world. According to Dorf, the support of Kirby and Ackerman cannot be emphasized enough in terms of lending credibility to the con. Among his many contributions to comic fandom, it must be remembered that it was Shel who managed to coax Jerry Siegel into attending his first comicon in the mid-1970s, and started the ball rolling to get Siegel and Shuster some justice.

Finally Richard Kyle decided to publish his own fanzine. *Graphic Story World* #1 (grandly sub-titled "the newsletter of the graphic story arts") debuted in May 1971, with the following statement of purpose by Kyle:

"The graphic story is coming of age. In America, Japan, France, Italy, and all across the world, unique and creative new stories are being told, and outstanding stories of the past are receiving fresh recognition. Once, the graphic story could be found only in children's comic books. Today, it appears in mass circulation slick magazines, hardcover books and paperbacks, underground 'comix' and limited edition experimental magazines, as well as in the four-color comic books and the newer black-&-white graphics. There is nothing more powerful, it is said, than an idea whose time has come. The time has come for the graphic story, and the great promise of the first 'Golden Age' of comic books is about to be realized. We'll tell the whole story here in *Graphic Story World*, and we will report, too, on the newspaper strip and the animated cartoon, and all the allied arts. I hope you will be with us."⁴

Graphic Story World began as an offset newsletter, then changed its name to *Wonderworld* and became a general comics fan magazine. "It was deliberately somewhat over-serious in tone, as I—a little heavy-handedly, I think—tried to bring comics criticism into the literary mainstream," Kyle related. "When my

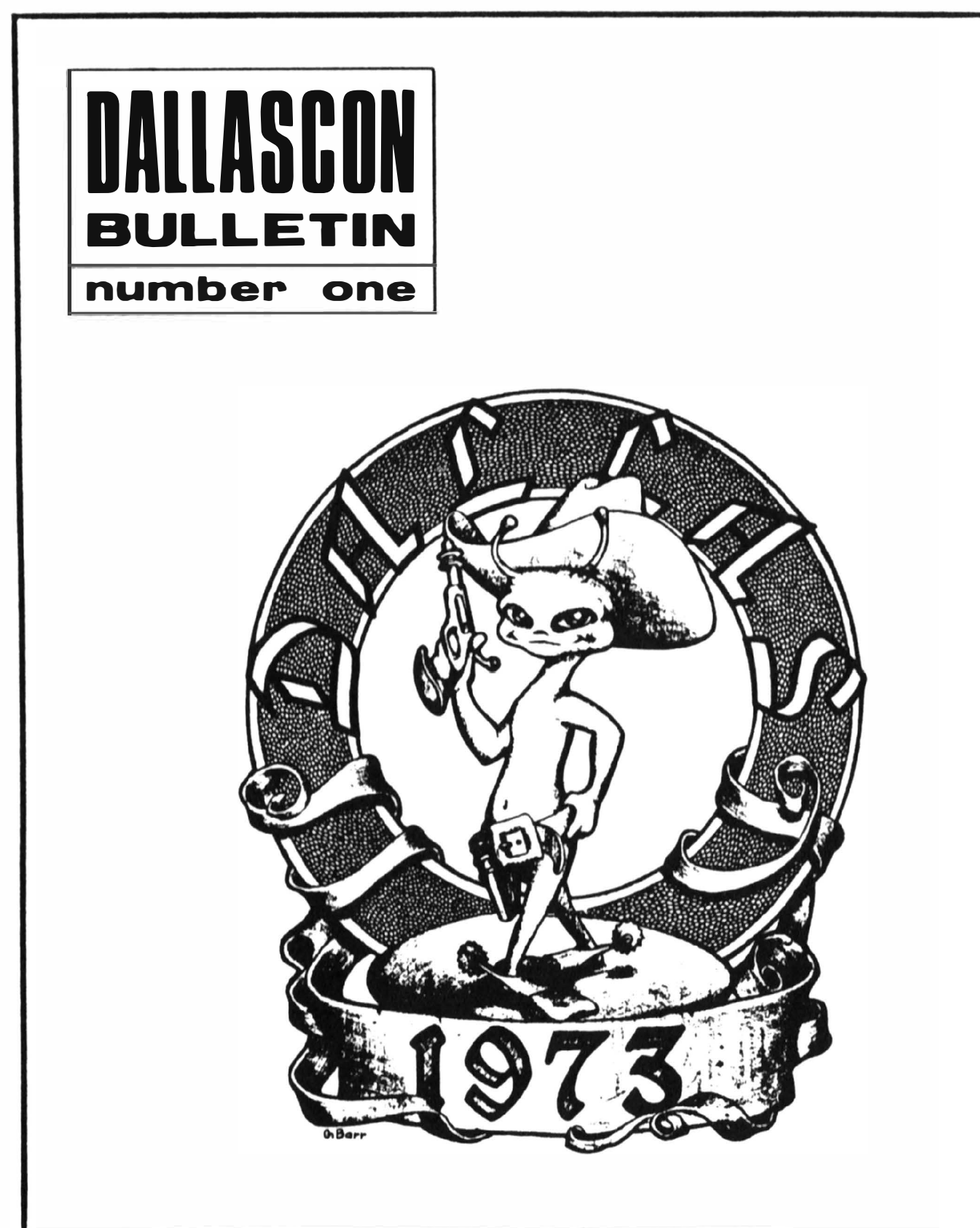
entire subscription list was destroyed in a flood, I discontinued publishing. Illness in my family made it too costly to begin again."

It was inevitable that G. B. Love's *Rocket's Blast-Comicollector* would eventually face competition for advertising dollars. Despite early efforts like Bob Jennings' short-lived *Comic Advertising Review* (1964), no one seemed willing or able to mount a serious challenge in the early days. Of course, there were gripes about RB-CC's haphazard lay-outs (especially before 1970), and the high prices Love charged for his SFCA zines, but in general the fanzine was well-liked and well-supported by fandom. Still, where there was one successful ad-zine, there could be two.

In 1966, Danny Cassidy inaugurated his *Komikollector* (soon renamed *Futura*) but it lasted a mere eight issues. Around the same time, Alan Jadro launched his *Comic Vendor*. 1968 saw two fairly credible efforts, *Inkling* and *Fandom's Agent*. *Inkling* was a non-profit endeavor of the Los Angeles Comic Book Club, in an effort to give members of comic book fandom an inexpensive place to advertise. So stated the editorial in the second issue. Unfortunately, *Inkling* didn't last long. Neither did Chuck Wooley's *Fandom's Agent*, which, although publishing some significant art and articles, suffered from an irregular schedule for its eight issues until he pulled the plug. It was clear that keeping a regularly-published ad-zine afloat was more difficult than some imagined, and not much fun.

Oddly enough, one of the more viable competitors began as a series of advance bulletins for a WorldCon

Below: The Dallascon Bulletin #1 first appeared in 1969; it went through several permutations, and continues today in the form of The Comics Journal.



bid from a group in Texas headed by Tom Reamy, Larry Herndon and Joe Bob Williams. The first *Dallascon Bulletin* came out in Spring 1969, was announced as a quarterly publication, and carried a smallish blurb about ad rates for the second issue. Aside from the pitch for a Dallas site for the 1973 WorldCon ("Big D in '73!"), the first issue consisted of several pages of ads from local fans and supporters of the bid. But what caught the eyes of many of the readers was the circulation, which (according to the indicia) was "approximately 5,000." The Dallas folks had compiled a huge mailing list of comics, sf, ERB, old-time radio, movie and serial fans. Potential advertisers took notice, and when "New, Cheap, Cheap Ad Rates" were announced with #3, the *Dallascon Bulletin* became a major new marketplace, cutting across many fandoms. The ads began to multiply, and when the Worldcon bid for Dallas collapsed, fans demanded that the magazine continue. Thus, with #11 (Fall 1971), the title changed to *Nostalgia News*, and the members of the committee (less Tom Reamy) kept it going.

Both *Nostalgia News* and *RB-CC* as advertising vehicles met their match when an energetic young fan in East Moline, Illinois, ended up publishing an advertising fanzine almost by default.

Alan Light had responded to a plug for *Comic Crusader* in Mark Hanerfeld's column in *Adventure* #374 (1968), and was soon cranking out fanzines like *Comic Cavalier* and *All-Dynamic*. But what he really wanted to do was publish a newspaper for fandom. *Voice of Comictim* had never really performed that function, but *The Comic Reader* had. When Hanerfeld had been unable to continue it, Light saw opportunity. But Paul Levitz was publishing *Et Cetera*, very much in the *TCR* mold, and Light could not get access to news of the pros. (In September of 1971, Hanerfeld gave Levitz his blessing to use the *TCR* name, thus *Et Cetera* became *The Comic Reader*, picking up the original numbering with #78.) A rebuffed Light decided to publish an adzine called *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom*.

"It was named, not too originally, after a local free shopper called *The Big River Buyer's Guide*," Light

recalled in an article celebrating the thousandth issue of *TBG's* successor, *Comics Buyer's Guide*. "I remember holding my breath to see if G. B. Love would publish my ad, since I was an obvious competitor out to take business away from him. That ad was critical to my success."⁵ Love *did* print the vital two-page ad for *TBG* #1 (in *RB-CC* #76, December 1970). The first issue was mailed out in February 1971, at no charge to the recipients.

"It seems a long time ago that I was sitting in my parent's living room, addressing the very first issue of *TBG*," Light wrote. "My mom, dad, sister, and grandmother all helped me wet and stick those labels on the 3000 copies. Never in our wildest imagination did we expect the paper to be as successful as it turned out to be."⁵

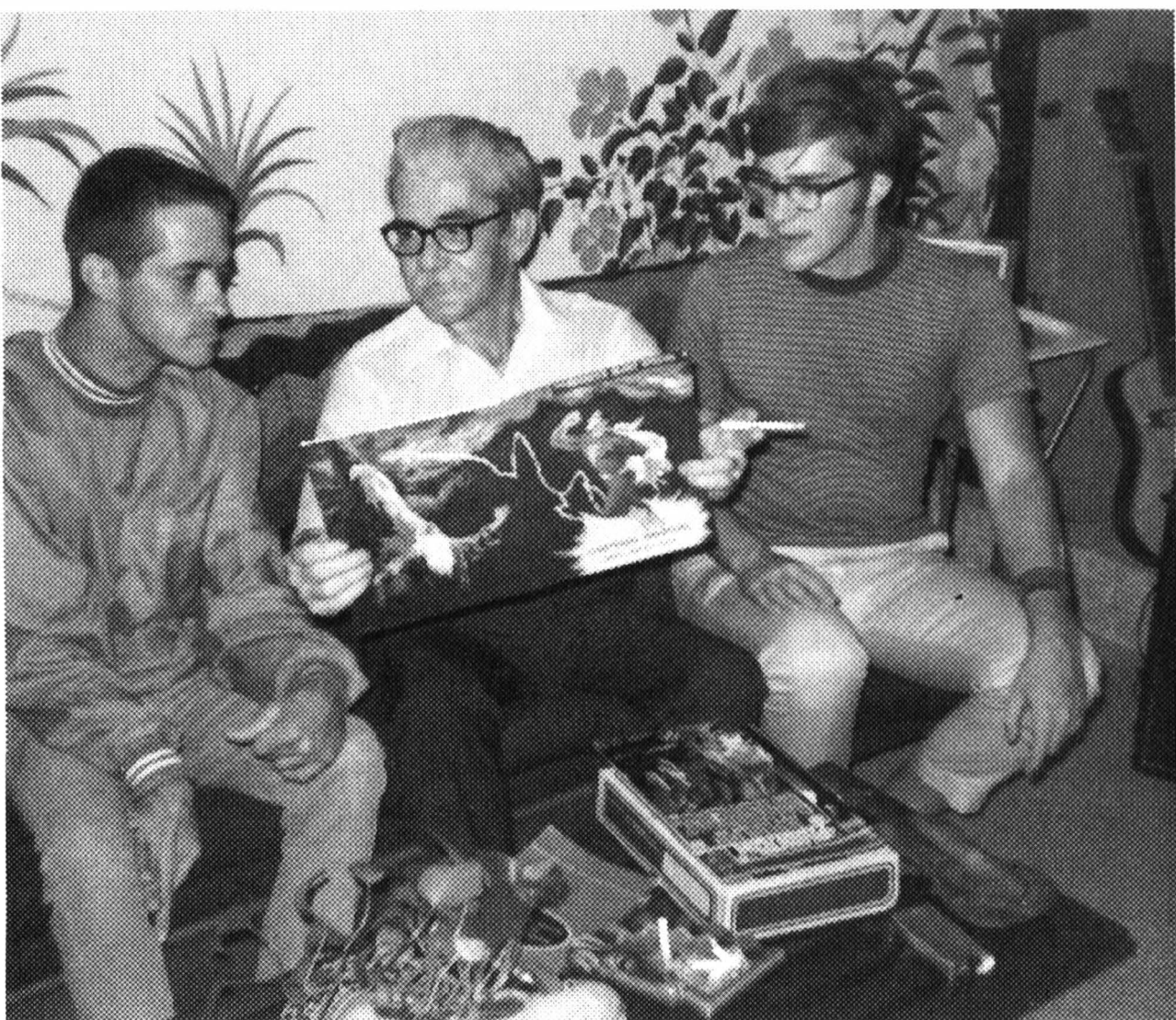
TBG, like *RB-CC*, was never known for its editorial content, though "Beautiful Balloons," the column by Don and Maggie Thompson, was well-written, and Cat Yronwode's "Fit To Print" news column was a key element. The ads were its mainstay, and when *TBG* switched to a weekly schedule (with #87 in July 1975), it became the undisputed leader in its field. Light stayed at the helm until #482 (February 4, 1983) when Krause Publishing bought it, continuing it under the slightly changed name of *Comics Buyer's Guide*.

In the interim, *RB-CC* had grown to such proportions (with a peak circulation of 2,500) that G. B. Love finally hired an assistant. James Van Hise had been a subscriber to the original *Rocket's Blast* since 1963, and met G. B. Love when he moved to Florida in 1970. "He decided he needed someone full-time, so he hired me and I worked literally six days a week," Van Hise recently remembered. Love continued to run the business, typed up the letter column, dealt with the contributors and printer, selected the cover, and so forth; Van Hise helped with lay-outs, filled orders, stuffed the printed issues into envelopes and mailed them. Around this time, the magazine's lay-outs improved markedly. Van Hise contributed many articles, which he accounts for giving him a great deal of writing experience. Since Love's cerebral palsy made verbal communication difficult, Van Hise took a lot of the phone calls. They worked together for the next four years, until, in 1974, G. B. Love decided to sell the *SFCA* to Jim.

Why, after thirteen years and over a hundred issues, did Love give up his business?

He put it this way: "At the time, *RB-CC* was supporting me and I was also paying Jim a salary. However, it was becoming less profitable. Also, the comic industry was showing signs of going in directions I did not want to go. I just did not enjoy it as much, because of the changes I could see coming." Love, whose political views and sensibility are firmly on the right of the spectrum, was not a fan of politically relevant comics (with distinct leftward leanings) like the O'Neil/Adams *Green Lantern-Green Arrow*. He was also friends with C. C. Beck, and was undoubtedly disgusted with the way Beck was treated by DC during the revival of the original Captain Marvel at that time.

But the overriding factor, which is inherent in Love's comment about the shrinking profitability of *RB-CC*, is that in the space of three years, *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* had attracted much of Love's ad revenue, and the trend was proving irreversible.



G. B. Love, C. C. Beck and James Van Hise, in September 1970.

AT LAST! attention: ADVERTISER!

Subject— GETTING YOUR AD TO OVER 5,000 COMICS FANS FOR ONLY \$16.00 PER FULL PAGE!

THE BUYER'S GUIDE

© Alan L. Light
RR #1 Box #297
East Moline, IL 61244

THE BUYER'S GUIDE

Dear Advertiser:

For a long while now, fandom (and consequently, yourself) has suffered from a lack of a largely-circulated, fandom-wide comics adzine. This has resulted in advertisers such as yourself often finding themselves having to purchase ad space in several different publications (and at no small cost!) just to reach the buying market and a substantial amount of interested persons.

Those days are over.

THE BUYER'S GUIDE will be just that fandom-wide adzine we so desperately need. The following paragraphs will tell you about this new venture, and how it tops all previous adzines!

5000 CIRCULATION! Yes, TBG will go out to over 5000 interested comics fans in the United States and other countries around the world. And there are 5000 comics fans in the U.S., don't let anyone say there aren't! Proof is that there were over 2000 (some reports say over 3000) comics fans at the 1970 comic art convention in New York City! And if over two to three thousand fans can be in New York (live there and afford to attend) then how many fans are there in the rest of the country that didn't make it? The 5000 mark can be topped easily!

IT WILL BE DISTRIBUTED FREE OF CHARGE! Just as the DALLASCON BULLETIN goes out free to many science fiction fans, so will TBG go out to nearly every comic fan (if not every comic fan!). Since it does go out free, it needn't rely on or be limited to only those who could afford to buy it...but instead goes out indiscriminately to everyone interested in the comics area! The new, low printing cost described later makes it possible for this and still keep the low ad rates!

PRINTING METHOD SAVES YOU MONEY, YET HIGH QUALITY MAINTAINED! Every issue of TBG is, naturally, entirely offset/litho! A difference from other adzines is that it will not be printed on glossy or shiny white paper stock to add on to the advertiser's cost of buying space, but will use newsprint. Granted, newsprint isn't the best paper around, but considering that it is strong, white, and that it saves you over \$10.00 per full page ad...would you want it any other way? The lighter stock not only costs nearly half that of the glossy stock...it's lighter in weight, too, thereby saving postage...and overall giving you the most economical buy in ad space ever!

(continued next page)

ADVERTISING RATES ARE THE LOWEST IN COMIC FANDOM! Full page ads are only \$16.00, half page ads only \$9.00, and fourth page advertisements only \$4.50! You read correctly! Comparing it to the ROCKET'S BLAST & COMICCOLLECTOR (whose ad rates are \$15.00 per full page for a circulation of 2000), you'll get your ad to reach 3000 more interested potential buyers for only a dollar more! Looking over at the DALLASCON BULLETIN, the full page ad rates are the same, yet it goes out to more science-fiction buffs than comics fans...and mainly serves that fandom (and it is to be discontinued after their goal...hosting a world science fiction convention...is completed! Why not help build up TBG...which is here to stay!) And then there are many more, smaller adzines but they always have a higher advertising cost in proportion to their circulation than TBG, so they need not even be mentioned! So you see...your TBG ad reaches the most "shoppers" for the least amount of investment on your part than anywhere else!

QUALITY OF MATERIAL AS HIGH OR HIGHER THAN ANY OTHER ADZINE! Through my past ventures, I have gotten to personally know some of the most talented people in the fan world, and a few in the pro one! Artwork (for covers &/or interior) can be expected from Don Newton, John G. Fantucchio, Dan Adkins, John A. Richardson, William Black, Stephen Fabian, Robert Kline, and many more! And even though I don't have to compete with other adzines by putting in space-taking articles and interviews (DBG goes out free, don't forget!), they will be included! Each issue will be as enjoyable as I can afford to make it, and your "ad bill" is the lowest it can possibly be, also, as you've no doubt already guessed! I am not out "for the buck"!

EXTRA FEATURES ALSO HAVE ADVANTAGES OVER OTHER ADZINES! I didn't spend \$550.00 on an I.B.M. "selectric" model typewriter for fun! Nor did I buy a \$1000 addressing machine just to have it to look at! These features help you and me, and they are another reason why this project needs your immediate support! This is quite an investment on my part!

The IBM type is used in such zines as TRUMPET, SQUA TRONT, and such pro magazines as LARRY IVIE'S MONSTER'S AND HEROES, so it is no ordinary typewriter (compare the clarity of this page ad and another!)! The typewriter, addressing machine, the over-\$100 worth of instant lettering purchased, and much more makes this project an expensive risk to me...let's make it a success!

ADVERTISING RATES AND SIZES IN DETAIL:

<u>FULL PAGE</u> (will occupy 8 1/2 x 11" when printed):	\$16.00 per
- SIZES: Any size 17x22" or under, will be reduced to fit.	
<u>DOUBLE PAGE</u> (will occupy 11x17" when printed):	\$30.00 per
- SIZES: Any size 34"x22" or under, will be reduced to fit.	
<u>ONE HALF PAGE</u> (will occupy 8 1/2 x 5 1/2" when printed):	\$9.00 per
- SIZES: Must be on either 8 1/2 x 11" or 12 3/4 x 8"...no other!	
<u>ONE FOURTH PAGE</u> (will occupy 4 1/4 x 5 1/2 when printed):	\$ 4.00 per
- SIZES: Must be on 8 1/2 x 11" paper or actual size <u>only</u> !	

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS: (will be re-typed on this IBM typewriter, printed actual size)
8 lines of 45 spaces each for \$1.00...above 8 lines, 12¢ per line.
Eight lines minimum, no maximum.

GUARANTEED CIRCULATION FOR THE FEBRUARY THE BUYER'S GUIDE (#1): 4500 - 5100

AD DEADLINE FOR TBG 1 FEB 1, 1971

To keep these extremely low advertising rates will require your help! I have invested a lot of money, time and effort in this project to help you advertisers get the best buy possible, and to continue to get the best buy...to put your advertising money where it will reach the most amount of interested persons with the least amount of investment on your part!

Thank you!

Alan L. Light

ALL READERS OF THE RB*CC WHO WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE TBG FREE (LIFETIME SUB), DROP ME A CARD...AND INCLUDE YOUR ZIP CODE.

At the beginning of a new decade, the above announcement trumpeted the launch of the second major advertising publication for comics fans, The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom. Ironically, G. B. Love's generosity in printing this ad for a potential competitor proved to be his undoing. Alan Light's zine gradually siphoned off much of Love's advertising revenue.

In G. B.'s last issue (RB-CC #112, July 1974), only nineteen of its ninety-two pages were paid ads.

In that issue, in his final editorial for RB-CC, Love wrote, "It is with some regret that I must announce that this is the last issue of the RB-CC I will publish. I imagine this comes as quite a surprise to just about all of you. I am by no means retiring from fandom ... but I am going to be taking it a little easier than I have for the past 14 years. I am thankful that I have Jim to pass the RB-CC on to. And I am also thankful for the loyalty and support of so many of our contributors.... I will be grateful to [the contributors] for the rest of my life. I've had many ups and downs in the past 14 years, but, fortunately, there were many more ups and I see no point in dwelling on the downs. From a personal standpoint, I am really looking forward to getting even

more involved in the Houston conventions next year."⁶

During Love's earlier trips to Houston, he had made numerous friends in the area. Thus, when he sold out, he moved to the Lone Star state and became partners with Earl Blair in assorted ventures including promoting conventions. James Van Hise took over as editor/publisher with RB-CC #113 and continued publishing every six weeks or so through #151 (October 1980).

Van Hise strengthened the editorial content, publishing special issues dedicated to the work of Vaughn Bodé (#121), King Kong (#129), Flash Gordon (#134), *Star Wars* (#139) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, with the only full-color center spread (#142). Covers and interior art were provided by Kerry Gammill, Mike Zeck, Bernie Wrightson, Tom Sutton, Steve

Fabian and Don Rosa. The page count remained consistently around eighty pages per issue.

"The only distribution prior to my taking over was direct mail subscriptions," Van Hise wrote recently. "After I became publisher, I began to interest other dealers in carrying the magazine, notably Bud Plant, Seagate (Phil Seuling) and Big Rapids Distributors."

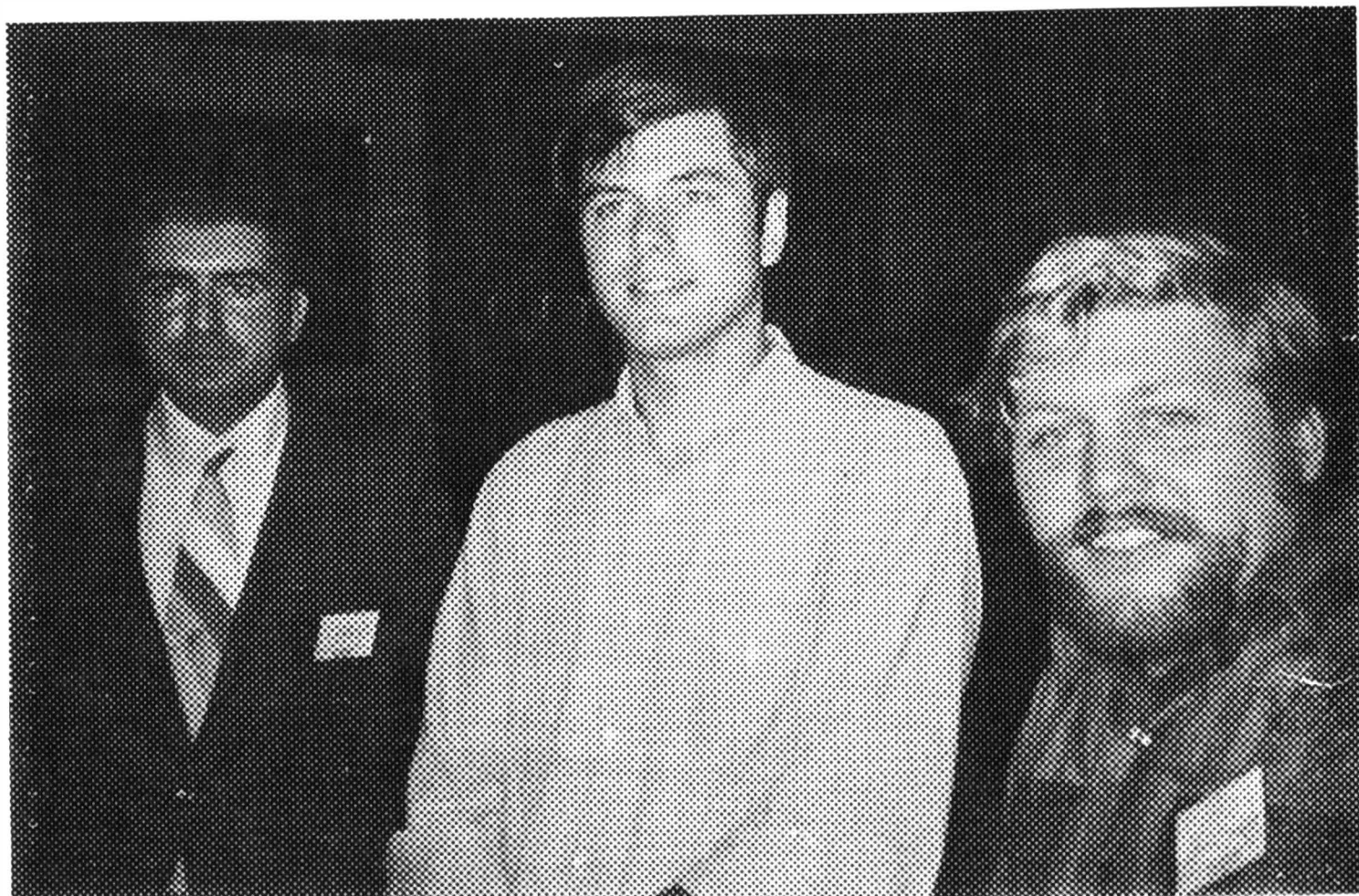
Just as G. B. Love was ready for a change, so were the publishers of one of the classic fanzines of fandom's Golden Age. In the summer of 1972, just shy of its tenth anniversary, *Star-Studded Comics* finally threw in the towel.

"There were several factors," Keltner explained. "Many of our contributors had turned pro, and it was getting difficult to obtain good material. Larry and Buddy were nine years older and were looking around for other things to do. The



THE 1969 COMIC-ART CONVENTION
STATLER HILTON HOTEL JULY



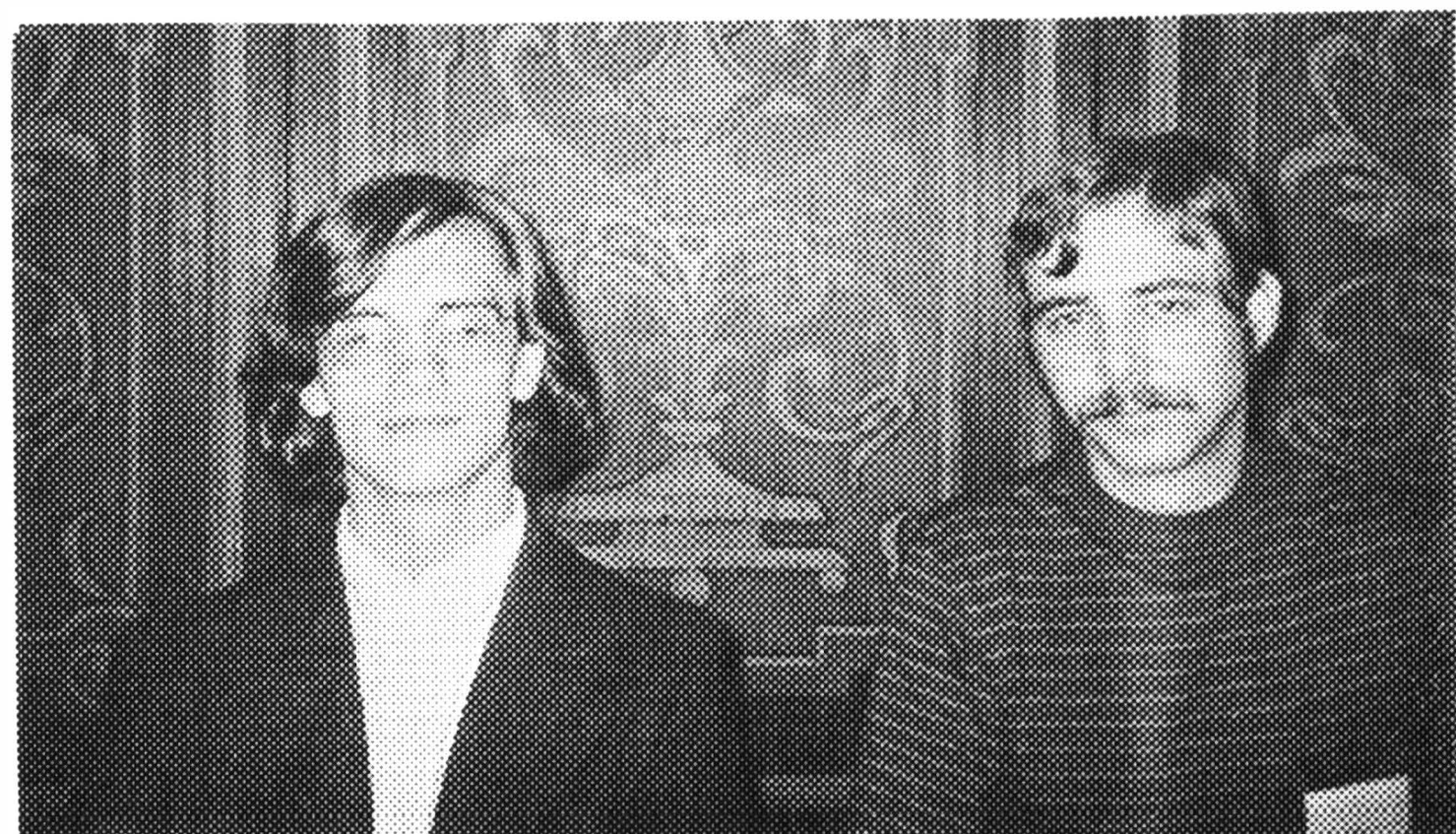


By 1969, a number of fan writers and artists were making the leap to pro-dom.

Left: John G. Fantucchio, Robert Kline and Dave Cockrum, three of the most prolific artists in the second half of the decade.



Left: Frank McLaughlin, Stan Landman, Irene Vartanoff, Eliot Wagner, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman and Mark Hanerfeld.



Berni Wrightson and Mike Kaluta



Mike Royer with Marty Greim

Overleaf (Ppg. 126-7): The 1969 Comic Art Convention portrait. Look at the first table in the lower right-hand corner. Man with the glasses and hands folded under his chin is Archie Goodwin. Going clockwise around the table: to his left, unidentified, then Gary Brown, Jeff Jones, Al Williamson, Jerry Weist, Sal Trapini, unidentified (with goatee), Gray Morrow and Angelo Torres. Can you find Dick Giordano, Marv Wolfman, Len Wein and Gerry Conway? Or Tom Fagan ... Martin Greim ... Roy Thomas? Front row, far right, are Bill G. Wilson (The Collector) and Gary Groth (Fantastic Fanzine) at about 15. Gary Brown wrote, "I do recall everything getting a great laugh out of the old guy who took it. He kept forgetting stuff and readjusting the camera."

fellow who was acting as our publisher [Joe Bob Williams] was losing some of his initial enthusiasm. We realized the fire was going out, so we shook hands and went our separate ways."

During its ten year run, SSC had published fifty-eight comic strips. *Star-Studded* #18 featured an epic sword and sorcery adventure, "Jabberwacky" by Steve Fritz, Dr. Weird in "The Miracle" by Jim Starlin and Howard Keltner, "Double Jeopardy" by Dennis Fugitake, and "Un-Man" by Dave Cockrum. With that final issue, an era in fan publishing ended.

The amateur comic strip continued into the 1970s, though more often with an eye toward creating a pro portfolio. Three talents who emerged from fandom during that period are Frank Miller, Jerry Ordway and John Byrne.

A final coda to the glory days of the 1960s was Martin Greim's *Comic Crusader Storybook* (1977), a lengthy collection (one hundred and sixty-eight pages) of brand-new strips featuring encore adventures of many of the best and brightest comic strip characters of the prior decade. New adventures of Dr. Weird, the Eclipse, the Human Cat and the Eye, all by their original creators, made for a memorable valentine to an era gone by.

Having gained momentum during the 1960s, comic book conventions really came into their own in the 1970s. Phil Seuling changed the name of the SCARP con to the Comic Art Convention in 1969, and managed to top himself year after year with July 4th gatherings in New York City that became a fan tradition.

Seuling had the gift of making friends with many of the most influential members of fandom, from Bud Plant to Roy Thomas to Bill Thailing. One of his key allies was Jim Steranko. Even before he began his innovative stint on Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. in Marvel's *Strange Tales* #151 (1966), he had attended the early New York comicons as a dealer. Fellow dealer Seuling and he developed a camaraderie that continued after Steranko became a sensation with his Op Art approach to Nick Fury (or, as Steranko called it, Zap Art). Jim was always on hand at Phil's conventions.⁷

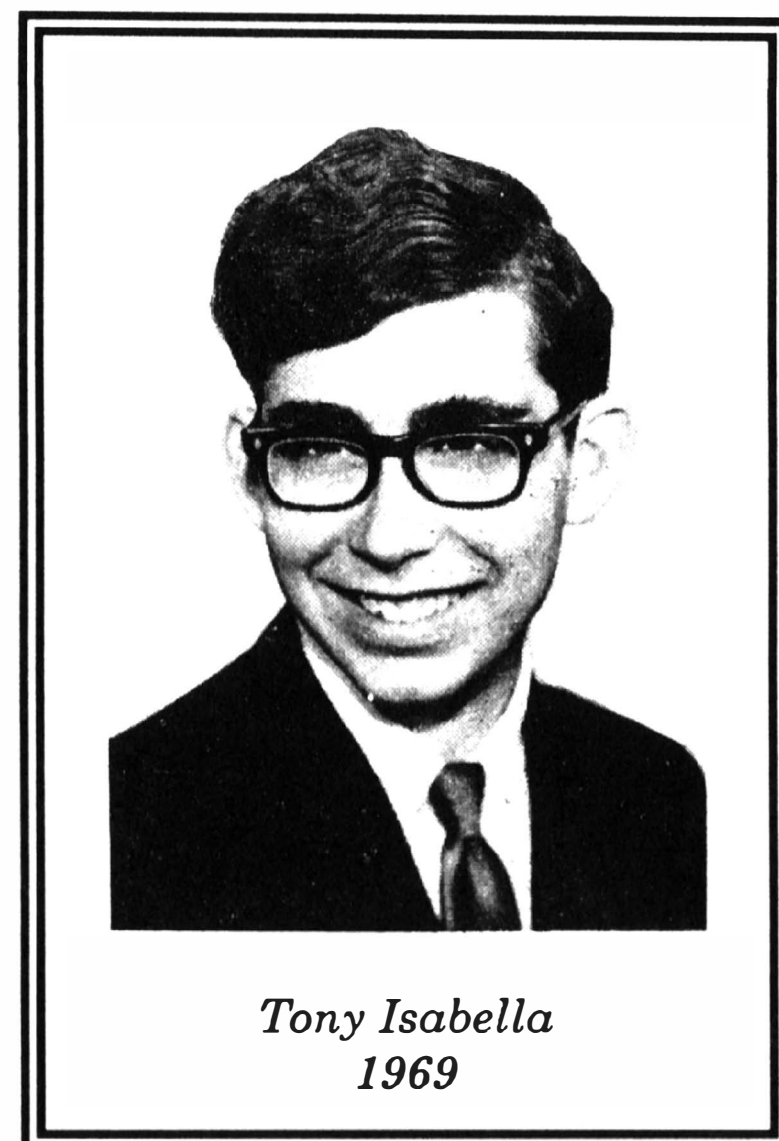
"In those days, Steranko would do convention sketches," Steranko historian J. David Spurlock wrote. "He did *The Conventioneers* to promote an early Phil Seuling con. It is easy to see how even the crude, quickly drawn *Conventioneers*—while a Seuling idea—also shows Steranko's knowledge of and interests in the world around him. Social issues of that era include the '68 Democratic Convention riots where Chicago police brutally beat legally protesting youths.

"Even closer to the time that the piece was produced was the Kent State incident in which National Guardsmen shot to death four college students." Spurlock continued, "Race hate crimes and mafiaesque assassinations are also represented in what is humorously a conversation between the juxtaposed characterizations of Nick Fury and Dick Tracy!" Ever mindful of the quality of his product, Steranko soon stopped doing "quickies" and con sketches.

According to Seuling in a 1971 interview, those early cons weren't moneymakers for him.⁸ In 1969, Gil Kane gave the keynote address. Bill G. Wilson wrote, "Kane ... feels that the super-hero is on the way out, as do we all, and the move to promote science fiction and sword-and-sorcery in comic books will soon be dominant."⁹ Two thousand fans attended this con, over double the previous year.

Thievery at comicons became a problem. "You talk about a kid running away with a dollar comic book and you say, aw well, the kid was tempted and ... it's only a comic book," Seuling said. "When a [dealer] loses a medium run of *All-Stars* ... that's grand larceny. And I'll tell you very frankly ... when we catch somebody stealing at a convention, I will prosecute. I've seen dealers cry from their losses. I won't have it, I just won't have it."⁸

Despite his profit motive, and somewhat gruff manner, Phil Seuling showed a genuine interest in the fans who attended his cons. He wanted them to get their money's worth, and they did. Mike Valerio related, "Whenever I attended Phil's [Comic Art Conventions], I always made it a point to yell out at Phil, as he was racing from one place to another, 'Hey, Phil! Great con!' And he always stopped, even if just for a



Tony Isabella
1969



Michael T. Gilbert as the Emerald Gladiator in 1971. Today, Gilbert is best-known as writer/artist of Mr. Monster. He has also worked for DC Comics, Dark Horse, Egmont and most other comics publishers over the past twenty-five years.

AND NOW...

THE CONVENTIONEERS!

MISTER, YA GOING TO THE COMICON IN NEW YORK THIS JULY?

NO! COMICS DON'T TURN ME ON ANY MORE! THE VIOLENCE IS TOO CONTRIVED!

CONTRIVED! ...COMICS ARE ONLY MIRRORS OF REALITY!

BULLFEATHERS! COMICS MAKE IT SEEM THAT BRUTALITY IS PART OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES...

...WHICH IS AN ABSURD IDEA!

HAT

COAT

PEACE NOT WAR!

SEULING AND STERANKO/..



CONVENTIONEERS © 1970 SEULING/STERANKO

minute, to demand: 'Are ya having a good time? Are ya havin' fun!?' "

"Phil Seuling was a great guy," Bill Thailing recently declared. "We had many dealings over the years. I learned a lot from him."

One interesting fact about Phil Seuling is that he provided the voice to one of the "pigs" in the *Fritz the Cat* animated movie. The producers were so enamored with Phil's voice that they enlarged his part. Seuling took his entire theater class from Lafayette High School to one of the recording sessions. Although superficially blasé about his show business debut, Phil admitted, "When the audience laughs at one of your lines, oh wow, it's really something else."¹⁰

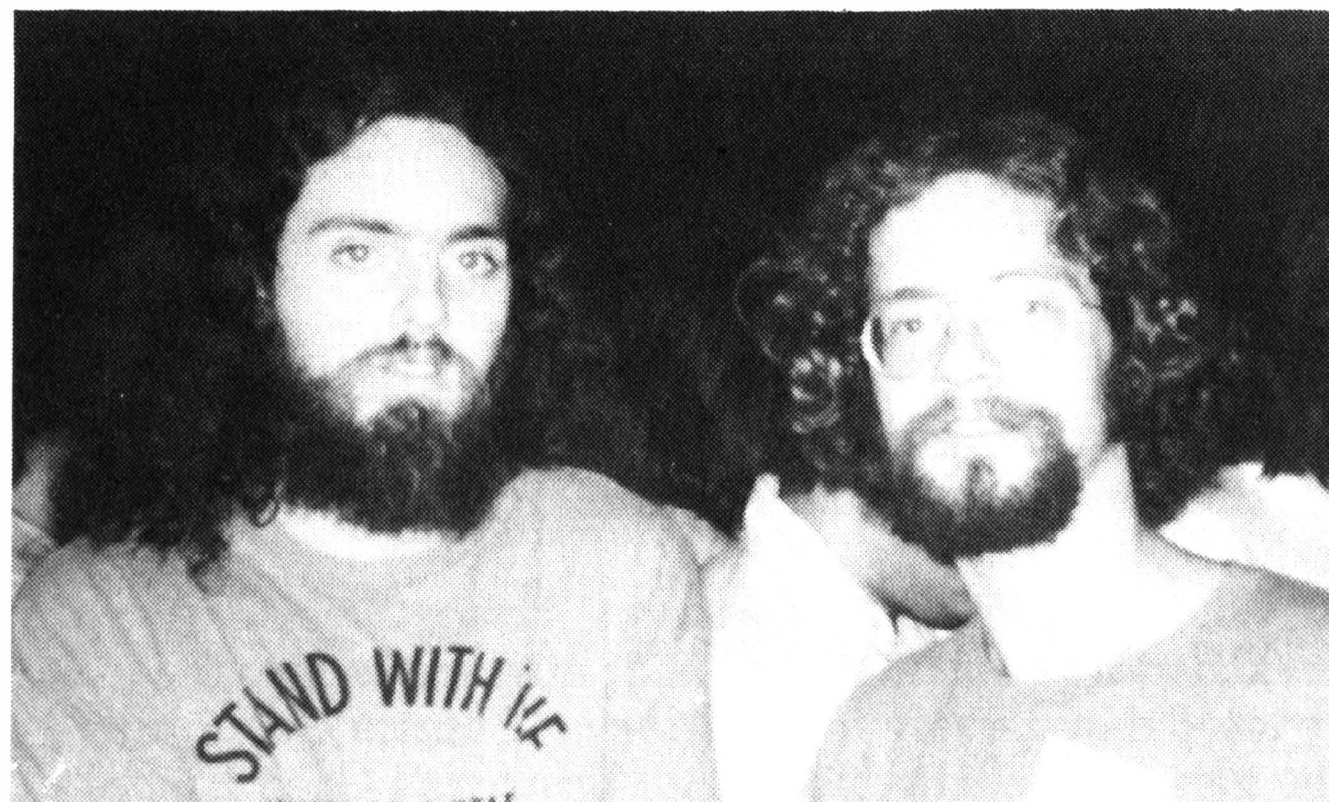
Joe Brancatelli's "1972 Fanac Calendar" in his *Comic Fandom Monthly* #5 (January 1972) clearly showed that fans would not lack for opportunities to get together at cons and smaller meets in the upcoming year. Apart from Seuling's smaller meetings on the second Sunday of each month, there were sixteen comicons plus a Worldcon scheduled for that year.

This spate of 1972 comicons included the one and only EC convention in New York City, put on by Bruce Hershenson and Ron Barlow. (They went on to produce the first EC reprints in color, the East Coast reprints.) Many of the EC artists were there; the heart of the convention was a series of panels featuring those artists. John Benson ran transcripts of those panels in *Squa Tront* #8.

1972 saw a significant event in the history of comics retail outlets, with the launching of the first Berkeley Comic Art Shop in San Francisco. Founded by Bud Plant, John Barrett and Bob Beerbohm, the store soon expanded into the first comic store chain Comics & Comix. Beerbohm wrote, "We noted at the time we cranked up ... that there were only twenty-two other existing comic book stores in the country when that first Berkeley Comic Art Shop opened its doors to the UC Berkeley populace. Many of those earlier comic book stores were still partially dependent on antiques. Most were not worried about acquiring the newest issues each week. There were eventually a couple hundred dedicated fans spread out across the country [who] started opening more comic book stores over the next couple years." The Comics & Comix stores were some of the first comic shops to regularly offer new comics. By 1973, they were purchasing mainstream comics from the local ID magazine distributor, though they kept quiet about it at first.¹¹ This was *before* Phil Seuling negotiated with DC and Marvel to distribute comics to comic book stores.

Like most of the terms adopted by comic fandom, sf fandom had invented the term comic fans used to explain the behavior of those who chose to leave the fannish ranks: "Gafia." Gafia stands for Getting Away From It All.

By the early 1970s, many of the original founders of comicdom had "gafiated." Perhaps they had just retreated into their own private appreciation of the hobby; or, outside obligations had forced them to "put

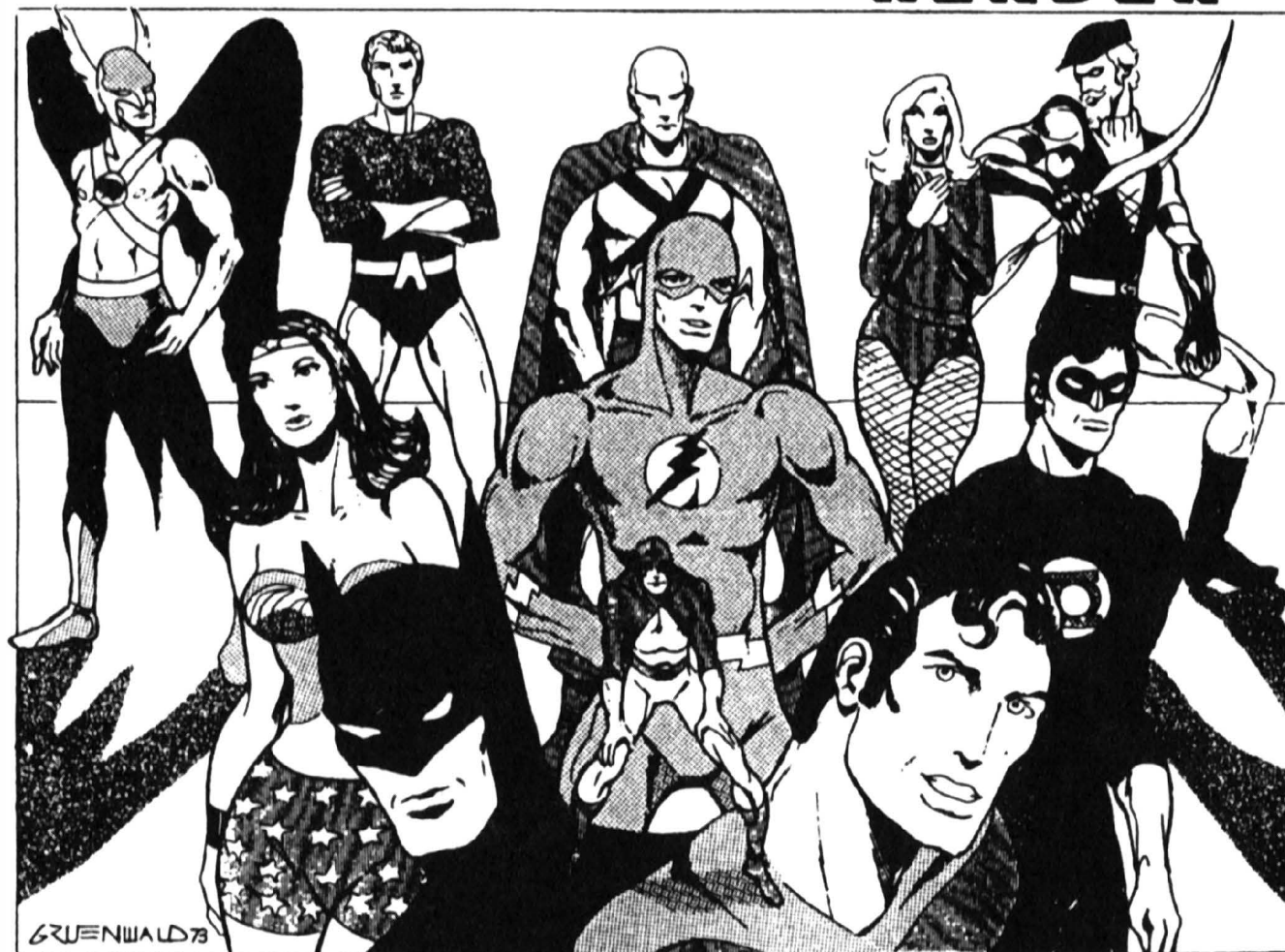


David Lofvers and Mark Gruenwald at Phil Seuling's 1973 New York comicon. Below: Their index to the JLA published that same year.

THE COMPLETE



READER



compiled by mark gruenwald and david lofvers

aside childish things." The baby boom generation was moving into adulthood, with its attendant responsibilities. In a lot of cases, collecting comics gave way to changing diapers.

In their place, a new crop of enthusiasts came forward to contribute ideas and energy that kept comicdom's engine firing on all cylinders.

Names like Tony Isabella, Mike Raub, Dwight Decker, Carl Gafford, Mike Robertson, Jim Korkis, Mark Gruenwald and Mike Benton began to crop up more and more in the late 1960s. Most published fanzines of their own. Decker came forward with *Freon*

Opposite Page: About artist Jim Steranko, his collaborator and biographer J. David Spurlock recently wrote: "Most great comics artists have been illustrator/cartoonists—who were inspired by the great adventure strip artists of the 30's and 40's. Only in the most extreme circumstance might their work be considered 'fine art.' While Steranko became a very capable illustrator, he has something more ... Statements, ideas, concepts and fashions including a darkness/noiristic orientation. These place him in an elite group of comic-book oriented fine artists. Steranko was—as a historian—an obvious fan of the medium putting untold hours into his work to see just what could be accomplished."

("I just thought the name sounded neat," he said later), Gafford produced *Minotaur* (which mainly featured ama-strips), Robertson published *Concussion* (a solid mimeo zine), Mike Raub had *Wonderment* and *Fandom Calling*, and Benton came up with *Heroic*. Isabella turned up everywhere, with opinion columns, articles and letters. They were the first generation of fans who could take the Marvel Age of Comics for granted. Most set their sites on careers in and around the comics industry.

When Golden Gate Features' *Yancy Street Journal* breathed its last in early 1966, numerous fanzines devoted exclusively to the Marvel Comics Group filled the gap. One of the most high-brow was Greg Kishel's *Marvel Mirror*. Most were of average-to-poor quality, but one emerged that any discussion of classic fanzines should include: *Fantastic Fanzine*. Its editor was a teenager named Gary Groth.

The early issues of *Fantastic Fanzine* were much like any other mediocre Marvel zine; but, it quickly improved, offering a quality photo-offset package with a large percentage of pro art, as well as plenty of work by Robert Kline, Dave Cockrum, William Black and other talented amateurs. The Steranko covers were knock-outs, as was Gary's interview with Steranko in *FF* #11 (1970). That interview was especially notable for its discussion of the business aspects of working in comics.

After *Fantastic Fanzine* #13, 17-year-old Groth started college, and for the next few years knocked around various universities and fill-in jobs, trying to figure out what to do with his life. He loved the print media, but attempts to work for others (like Steranko) had convinced him he wanted to be his own boss. Around 1976, he noticed the editors of *The Nostalgia Journal* (formerly the *Nostalgia News*) were tiring of competing with Alan Light's *TBG*, and Groth convinced them to let him take the *Journal* off their hands.

Thus, Groth's Fantagraphics took over with issue #27 (July 1976) with the blurb, "Beginning a New Era in Adzines! (Watch out, *TBG*!)" Gary kicked things off with a stinging attack on Alan Light's business practices that caused quite a furor. However, the *Journal* was unable to successfully compete with *TBG*. The emphasis shifted from ads to editorial content, and the name was changed to *The Comics Journal*. As he matured, Gary Groth tired of the fare being churned out by both Marvel and DC, and the *Journal* became a forum for lively discussions about the state of the comics industry, and ways that comics could raise their standards.

Fans of the Legion of Super-Heroes became a force to be reckoned with in the early 1970s. In August 1971, a 13-year-old fan named Mike Flynn wrote a letter to DC Comics announcing his plan to start a fan club for the Legion. It was printed near the end of the year in *Superboy*. The first respondent was Rich Morrissey. Within a couple of months, a hundred Legion fans had joined up, and soon that number doubled. Mike Flynn and Harry Broertjes teamed up to produce *The Legion Outpost* #1 (June 1972), and Legion fandom was born.

The Legion Outpost wasn't really a fanzine per se, according to Mike. It was a newsletter, consisting of fourteen stapled pages of pen-pal lists, short features, club plans, fan artwork, news, etc. Legion fans, virtually all of them not a part of organized comic fandom yet,

tended to be in their early teens. They could identify strongly with young super heroes who were very much like themselves.

Legion fans proved to be a tenacious lot. Others who came to the fore early were Jay Zilber and Mercy Van Vlack. Though the *The Legion Outpost* continued sporadically through the 1970s, the focus shifted to the participatory world of the apa (amateur press association) that was started by Rich Morrissey in June 1976: *Interlac*.¹² Members have included Jim Shooter, Paul Levitz, Mark Waid, Neal Pozner and Keith Giffen.

The Legion Fan Club did its utmost to keep the Legion alive at DC, and to influence the handling of the strip. Eventually wearing down the perplexed and bemused Murray Boltinoff, the Legion pushed Superboy out of the book three years after Flynn's letter was published. The Legion continues to be a major part of the DC universe, forty years after its inception.

How to explain the enduring attraction of the Legion of Super-Heroes? Val Beasley put it in a manner in which most Legion fans concurred: "The Legion has built-in 'nifty' appeal."

How many different fanzines were actually published during the Golden Age of comic fandom? By October 17, 1971, John McGeehan had a list of 631 various fanzine titles, with a total of 2,720 different issues among them. Of this total, which included fanzines devoted to Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard and movie serials, at least 2,000 were comic-oriented. *Three times as many* appeared in the second half of the decade, as compared to the number that had surfaced in its first half.

As if to bracket the end of an era, the Twentieth Century Fund financed a study of the fanzine phenomenon written by none other than Dr. Fredric Wertham, author of *Seduction of the Innocent*. Recently, Dwight Decker wrote, "I may have gotten Dr. Wertham interested in comics fandom. It goes back to 1969, when I was planning my fanzine *Freon*. I got to wondering... was [Wertham] still alive? Could I get in touch with him? Wouldn't an interview with Dr. Wertham be just the thing for my fanzine?"

"I looked Dr. Wertham up [in *Who's Who*] and found him still alive with a working address. From there it was a simple matter to whip out a letter and some questions for an interview. Amazingly, he replied. He didn't answer the specific questions I posed, but wrote a more general letter that was not unfriendly, though disavowing some of the charges against him. He seemed unfamiliar with comics fandom, and curious about it. A correspondence followed, I answered his questions about fanzines, and the next thing I knew, he was ordering the things."¹³ Martin Greim and Rob Gluckson were among other fans who corresponded with Wertham at this time.

Fans worried that Dr. Wertham was planning another attack, this time on comicdom, but this didn't prove to be the case. When *The World of Fanzines* appeared from Southern Illinois University Press in 1973 as a one hundred and forty-four page hardback book, it turned out to be a surprisingly mild, if somewhat off-kilter, study of amateur publishing. His point of view was distinctly that of an outsider.

"Gradually I became interested in them as a phenomenon," he wrote, "and finally I began to study them. In my analysis, the editing of fanzines is a

constructive and healthy exercise of creative drives. Fanzines are a healthy part of our society."¹⁴ But, as Decker correctly pointed out, Wertham seemed almost unaware that comicdom was based around the study of comic books, which he had railed so much against. Nevertheless, *The World of Fanzines* is an unexpectedly gentle, if insignificant, tome.

The doctor made an interesting observation. "Drawings by professional artists add, of course, something to fanzines," Wertham wrote, "but they do not belong to their essential spirit and character as amateur productions. In fact, too much reliance on pro-art means, according to some, that a fanzine has failed."¹⁴

By 1972, the face of comic fandom was dramatically different than just a few short years before. Most of fandom's founders were no

longer in the forefront, if they hadn't dropped out of sight altogether. Many of the classic fanzines were either in the midst of dramatic changes or had been discontinued. The sea of low-circulation ditto and mimeo fanzines had been superseded by photo-offset magazines dominated by pro art. The Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors was dead, and with it the Alley Awards. The amateur comic strip played a more marginal role in the fanzines, and the comicons gradually took on a more business-like veneer as they grew larger and more successful. *The Comic Book Price Guide* substantially achieved the sought-after goal of listing all comics ever published, but brought with it changes in the way comics were bought and sold.

In the 1950s, those who created comic books had (largely) believed that their audience was mainly

kids whose interest in comics was superficial and fleeting. Comicdom had demonstrated that a significant body of fans and collectors had an intense appreciation of comic art, and could back up that interest with cash. Slowly, elements of the comic industry (and other enterprising individuals) had begun tapping that new market, until that market grew to such an extent that it began shaping the industry itself.

In the process, the principle of hobbyism (which respected the ideal of non-profit endeavor) gave way to capitalism. Fans, hardly realizing what was happening, and thrilled by the array of new comics-related products created especially for them, fell into step.

Comicdom was irrevocably changed. The age of innocence was over, and so too was comicdom's Golden Age.

Footnotes - Chapter 12

¹Don and Maggie Thompson, *Comic Feature*, 1980.

²George Olshevsky, "Conversation With Bob Overstreet," *Collector's Dream Magazine* Vol. 1 #4, Spring, 1978.

³Bob Overstreet, Introduction to *The Comic Book Price Guide*, First Edition, 1970.

⁴Richard Kyle, *Graphic Story World* #1, May, 1971.

⁵Alan Light, "Through Time and Space with Buyer's Guide," *Comics Buyer's Guide* #1000, Krause Publications, January 15, 1993.

⁶G. B. Love, *RB-CC* #112, July 1974.

⁷Those who would like to know more about Steranko's phenomenal career would do well to find a copy of Vanguard Production's *Tales from the Edge Special Steranko: Graphic Prince of Darkness*, published in March 1998.

⁸Jeffrey Wasserman and Bob Zimmerman, "Phil Seuling," *Fantastic Fanzine Special II*, Vol. 1, No. 2., February 1972.

⁹Bill G. Wilson, "The 1969 NY. Comic Art Convention Report," *The Collector* #16, 1969.

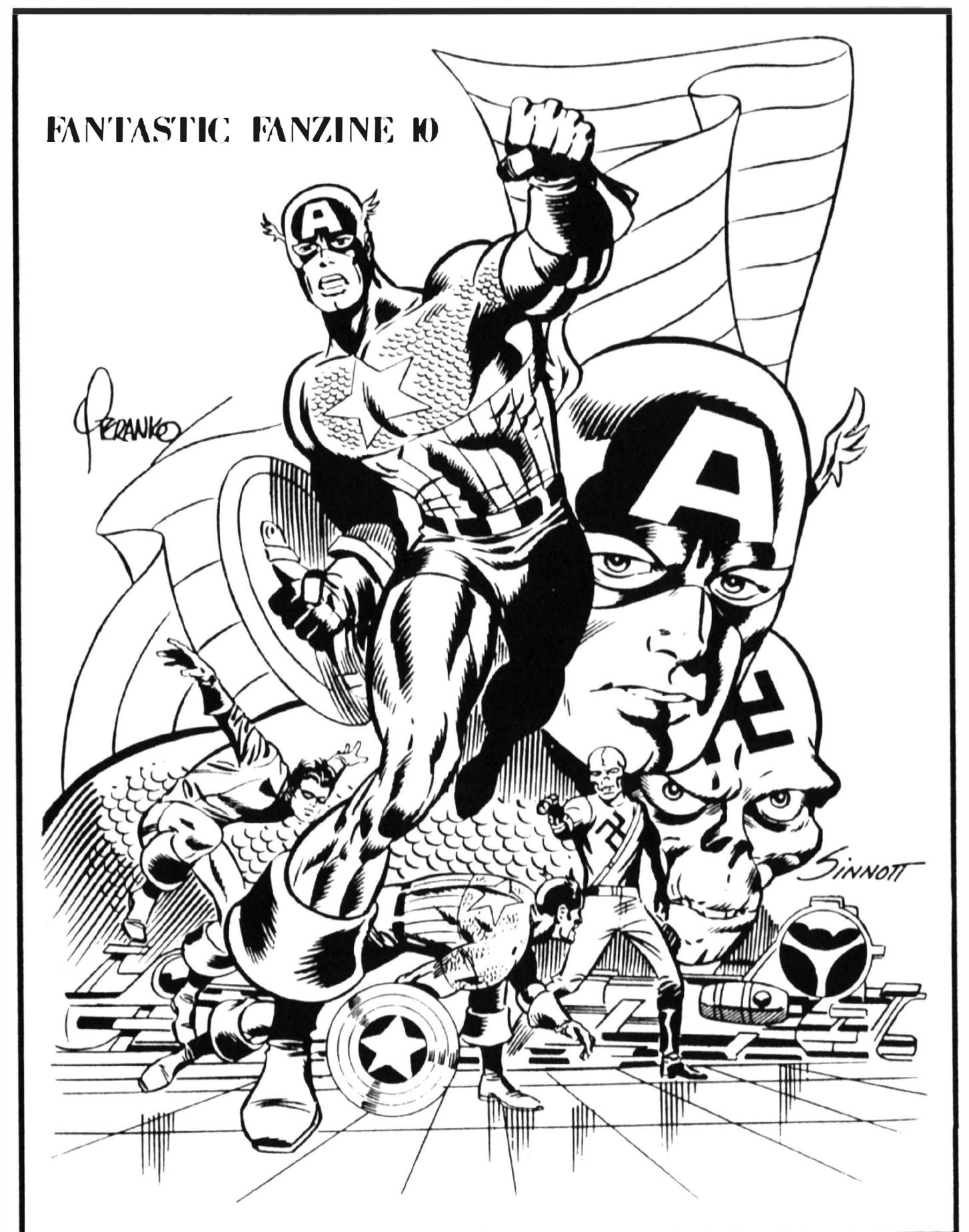
¹⁰Joe Brancatelli, "Phil Seuling...Super Star," *The Monster Times* #11, June 14, 1972.

¹¹According to Bob Beerbohm, the partners in Comix & Comics were a major driving force in putting on Berkeleycon 73, which was a seminal event for its passing on the concept of creative ownership from the underground cartoonists to the young, innovative talents who were making a name for themselves in the New York comics community. See his forthcoming book *Comic Book Store Wars*.

¹²Morrissey first named the apa *LEAPA* but this was not liked, and was changed with #4 to *Interlac*, which is the Intergalactic Language of the 30th Century in the Legion strips.

¹³Dwight Decker, *Torch* #84, *Capa-alpha* #360, October 1994.

¹⁴Fredric Wertham, Ph.D., *The World of Fanzines*, 1973.



A Personal Postscript

An Epilogue of sorts, wherein the author moves from third to first person ...

Because I participated in 1960s comic fandom, it might be asserted that I'm seeing that era through rose-colored glasses—that I'm overstating the virtues of that formative period.

Obviously, I don't agree. Sure, I have intense feelings of nostalgia for that bygone era, but I don't think those emotions are the reason I deem 1961 to 1972 the Golden Age of comic fandom—any more than fond remembrance is the sole cause for calling the late 1930s and 1940s the Golden Age of comics.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines a "golden age" (in part) as, "A period of great progress, prosperity, or cultural achievement." A Golden Age is a time when a great burst of creativity occurs, which lays the groundwork for what will follow. Just as the earliest adventures of Superman only hint at the possibilities for the character, the early comics fanzines merely established a basic format which

would be improved upon as the fan-eds honed their craft. Those early fans set the wheels in motion, and today we can detect the fruits of their labor in every corner of our hobby.

Maybe the most obvious examples are the many comic book professionals who came from the ranks of fandom. By the early 1970s, as old time pros were reaching retirement age (Mort Weisinger, for example), the comic book companies were beginning to see the need to bring in fresh talent. When new blood was needed, comicdom was the logical place to find it.

E. Nelson Bridwell, Archie Goodwin and Roy Thomas had been the earliest success stories, but eventually the list expanded to include Rich Buckler, John Byrne, Dave Cockrum, Richard Corben, Mark Evanier, Kerry Gammill, Steve Gerber, Dave Gibbons, Michael T. Gilbert, Don Glut, Sam Grainger, Mark Gruenwald, Rick Hoberg, Klaus Janson, Jeff Jones,

Al Milgrom, Frank Miller, Doug Moench, Don Newton, Jerry Ordway, Neal Pozner, Don Rosa, Jim Starlin, Joe Staton, Dave Stevens, Jan Strnad, Mike Vosburg, Len Wein, Alan Weiss, Marv Wolfman and John Workman. The "uncrossable barrier" between amateur and pro was no longer insurmountable, which was excellent news for those who would have otherwise been working without pay for the ama-strip fanzines.

Former members of fandom have been at least partly, if not wholly, responsible for the renaissance of the Superman titles, *Dreadstar*, *Swamp Thing*, *The New Teen Titans*, *The Power of Shazam*, *Tomb of Dracula*, *Concrete*, *The Rocketeer*, *Mr. Monster*, *Howard the Duck*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *E-Man*, *Tug & Buster*, *The Invaders*, *The Watchmen*, the successful revival of *The Uncanny X-Men* in 1975, and *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Let's not forget Stephen King. The man behind *The Shining*, *The*

Stand and a zillion other best sellers of horror fiction got his start in comicdom.

Then there's Gene Klein. Gene published *Cosmostillette* and *Tinderbox*, and wrote columns for a number of zines like Jeff Gelb's *Men of Mystery*. You don't recognize his name? Maybe that's because he's better known today as Gene Simmons of the heavy-metal rock group Kiss. Simmons is the one with the incredibly long tongue—doubtless gained from licking all those stamps.

Most of the classic fanzines, which were so central to the Golden Age of comic fandom, are gone now. *The Rocket's Blast-Comicollector* lasted a long time, but eventually ran out of steam. In 1980, the printer announced a rate increase. "Rather than trying to hunt around for another printer, New Media was interested in publishing it, although they ended up publishing only a couple of issues," James Van Hise explained. When New Media took it over, Van Hise began working for them doing all kinds of packaging and editorial work. The last official issue, *RB-CC* #153, appeared in 1981. Another issue was destroyed due to a printer's error and never reprinted, and a special Russ Manning tribute issue intended for *RB-CC* was, instead, published by New Media as *Comic Feature* #26 (November/December 1983). Thus, the twenty-one year run of the *RB-CC* ended.

The Comic Reader is also gone.

But the news-zine and ad-zine have survived in the form of Krause Publications' *Comics Buyer's Guide*, a direct descendant of the fanzine world, and edited by Maggie Thompson, whose important role in fandom (along with that of Don Thompson) is chronicled in this book. Other current publications aimed at comic collectors are helmed by fans from the old days: Gary Carter and Pat Calhoun of *The Comic Book Marketplace*, and Roy Thomas of the *Alter Ego* sections in each issue of TwoMorrows' *Comic Book Artist*.

We currently have a choice of several price guides, but the standard is still Overstreet's *Comic Book Price Guide* which has been shepherded since its inception by Bob Overstreet, whose roots in

comicdom reach back to the very beginning.

Today's comic book conventions are also a legacy of the early years of comicdom. Phil Seuling knew how to put on a successful comicon, and continued his role as chief impresario of the July 4th New York convention throughout the 1970s (though some lamented the slickness that inevitably came along). His Comic Art Conventions lasted into the 1980s. Shel Dorf took his expertise from the Detroit Triple Fan Fair and, as we've already seen, founded the world's most successful comicon in San Diego. The San Diego Comicon (now known as Comic-Con International) continues to operate on a non-profit basis—though it seems to be taking on more of the aspects of a trade show, with its plethora of booths

promoting pro comics, video games and other products. It remains the premiere comic book convention in the world. Other important shows as the millennium approaches are the WizardCon in Chicago, DragonCon in Atlanta, the Motor City Comicon in Detroit, the Heroes Convention in Charlottesville, the Mid-Ohio Comicon and WonderCon in San Francisco.

Comics apa *Capa-alpha*, founded by Jerry Bails in 1964, is still going strong, having passed its 400th mailing in February 1998. In the fanzine arena, *K-a* (as it's abbreviated) is the last survivor of that halcyon era. Apas have kept the spirit of fannish publishing alive, though it seems that younger fans prefer to communicate in various ways through Internet newsgroups and other



CAPA - alpha

Last Survivor of the GOLDEN AGE OF COMICDOM

Kaptain-alpha, the mascot of Capa-alpha, faces his destiny in the 30th anniversary mailing of the first comics apa.



configurations available in cyberspace. (The Internet has certainly made it easier than ever for those with esoteric tastes to find kindred souls.)

Many well-known fans and pros have held sway in *Capa-alpha* over the years, including Mike Barrier, Bill Blackbeard, Harry Broertjes, Gary Brown, Dwight Decker, Mark Evanier, Ken and Wendy Fletcher, Carl Gafford, Jeff Gelb, Steve Gerber, Fred Hembeck, Richard Howell, Tony Isabella, Carol Kalish, Jim Korkis, Guy H. Lillian, Neal Pozner, Mike Raub, James Shull, Joel Thingvall, Roy Thomas, Don Thompson, Maggie Thompson, Mark Verheiden, Jerry Weist and Kim Weston. I've been a roster

member four times, most recently from 1997 to the present.

For the average comic book fan and collector, perhaps the single most obvious outgrowth of comicdom is the comic book specialty store and the direct market that supplies them. Though they did not precisely and wholly grow out of fandom, one can't imagine they would have come into existence if comicdom hadn't organized. Some of the original retail outlets were hippie head shops, but a good proportion (like Cherokee, Able-Man, Collectors and others) *did* have their roots in the comic fan movement of the 1960s. And the man who finally convinced DC Comics (and soon Marvel and

Warren) to sell direct to comic dealers who were not served by regular distributors *was* long-time fan Phil Seuling. The announcement was made in the fan press in early 1974. (Selling comics on a *non-returnable basis* was still seven years away.) The history of the direct market is beyond the province of this book. I'll leave it to others with more expertise in that area to tell the whole story.

Many of the owners of comic book stores today date back to the early days of comicdom. Buddy Saunders, former editor of *Star-Studded Comics*, owns Lone Star Comics, one of the top retail chains in the country.

Then, too, fans moved into the management and ownership of comic book publishers. Paul Levitz, former editor of *The Comic Reader*, is currently Executive Vice President and Publisher of DC Comics, Inc. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Gary Groth and Kim Thompson preside over Fantagraphics Books, one of the few alternative publishers who keep the spirit of underground comix alive. Richard and Wendy Pini's Warp Graphics began *Elfquest* in the realm of amateur publishing.

Perhaps in the course of writing this book, the dealers of old comics haven't been given enough coverage, but comic fandom couldn't have existed without them. For a lot of fans, the dealers were more important than any fanzine, and it seems certain that the comicons would never have gotten off the ground without the lure of the dealer rooms. The rank and file of fandom are *collectors*, and dealers made collecting back issues possible.

With the passage of time, it should come as no surprise that a number of well known fans are no longer among the living.

Edwin Aprill Jr. perished from injuries received in an auto accident on February 4, 1972.

John McGeehan, for reasons unknown to his family and friends, took his own life on November 28, 1980.

Alan Hanley died on his way home from a convenience store December 24, 1980, when his Volkswagen van plowed into a tree.

Larry Herndon, who fought so hard with muscular dystrophy over

the years, finally lost the battle and succumbed in autumn 1982, after starting Remember When, one of the first comic book retail stores in North Texas.

Phil Seuling died on August 21, 1984, at age 50, from the debilitating effects of liver disease.

Others who have passed away include Ron Haydock, Marty Pahls, Roger Brand, Bob Sidebottom, E. Nelson Bridwell, Dan Alderson, Barry Bauman, and Rick Durell.

Two deaths rocked comicdom in 1994: Don Thompson, who died in his sleep from apparent heart failure (after conquering other health problems), and Neal Pozner, who died of AIDS.

When Mark Gruenwald had a fatal heart attack, his wife carried out his wish that his ashes be mixed into a Marvel comic book—which turned out to be a reprinting of *Squadron Supreme*. This ultimate statement of love of the medium made international newscasts.

In 1998, Archie Goodwin passed away and is much missed. Howard Keltner of Texas Trio fame lived just a little over a year after the Fandom Reunion in Chicago, succumbing to kidney and liver failure on July 29th, 1998. His *Golden Age Comic Books Index*, Howard's "life work" as an indexer, was published posthumously by his longtime friend Bob Klein.

Fortunately, all these people left fandom with a legacy in the form of published work in fanzines which still nestle in private collections across the country.

And what of those to whom time has thus far been kinder?

G. B. Love lives in Pasadena, Texas, a suburb of Houston. "I guess you could say I am semi-retired though I still dabble in collectibles," he writes. He doesn't collect current comics, though. "The comics of today ... glorify sex and violence," which he finds to be "extremely detrimental to society." Love and Walter Irwin joined up to publish a long-running series of paperbacks entitled *The Best of Trek*, which is still running.

Richard Lupoff works at a radio station in Berkeley, California, and is the author of a popular series of detective novels such as *The Comic Book Killer*. His son Ken manages a comic shop in the area.

Tom McGeehan still works in the family shoe repair shop. He's an inveterate movie-goer, and has remained active in *Capa-alpha*, where he has been a member continuously since the first mailing in 1964.

The Oklahoma Alliance of Fans went on hiatus in the mid-1980s, but in 1996 the fanzine *OAF* returned under the editorship of its founders, Bart Bush and Matt Waldroop. Today it continues to be published, and Bart and Matt are preparing to launch the *Merriwell Reader*, devoted to the adventures of one of America's greatest adventure heroes, Frank Merriwell. Many of the original OAFs have remained active in fan circles.

Paul Gambaccini lives in England, and is an executive for the BBC.

Paul Seydor has become a successful film editor in Hollywood, recently on the Kevin Costner movie *Tin Cup*.

Michael Uslan became a movie producer, most notably of the blockbuster *Batman*.

Robert "bhob" Stewart works for DC Comics today, on special projects for Joe Orlando.

Bernie Bubnis owns two stores which sell windows and doors, and uses his communication skills for sales rather than writing and drawing.

Richard Kyle, the man who originated the terms "graphic story" and "graphic novel" owned and operated Richard Kyle books in Long Beach, California for many years.

Howard Rogofsky is still going strong, having years ago shifted his emphasis to TV Guides, teen magazines and other ephemera. The venerable Claude Held stays active too, mostly selling vintage newspaper strips.

Jerry Weist, originator of *Squa Tront*, now manages the famous Sotheby comic book auctions, which each year makes news with the incredibly high prices that the rarest and most

sought-after comic art items have commanded.

Don Glut wrote for almost all of the major comics companies, mostly during the 1970s, and is probably best known for writing the novelization of the movie *The Empire Strikes Back*. He is co-owner (with Pete Von Sholly) of Fossil Records, for which both he and Von Sholly perform and record the series of *Dinosaur Tracks* albums, and is primarily known in more recent years for serious writings about dinosaurs.

Bud Plant, who pioneered both retail and distribution in the comics field has gone on to own and manage a highly successful mail order operation known as Bud Plant Comic Art out of his warehouse in Grass Valley, California.

Biljo White is working in a Veterans hospital in Columbia, Missouri, but has been inactive in fandom for many years. He still draws an occasional comic strip when the occasion warrants it, and has retained a portion of his legendary collection of Golden Age comics.

In 1975, Ronn Foss moved to the Missouri Ozarks seeking a simpler, more rustic lifestyle, and has lived in a cabin on his twenty acres without a phone or running water ever since. He supports himself with custom art commissions, and remains interested in the worlds of pro comics and fannish activity. Most recently, he co-created *Destiny*, *Vampire Mermaid* with Dennis Druktenis, and produces a comic strip installment of her adventures in each issue of *Scary Monsters* magazine, with art collaborators Mike Vosburg, Grass Green, J. E. Smith and myself.

Roy Thomas, who succeeded Stan Lee as editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, continues to write comics for several publishers, including special Superman and Conan projects for DC and Marvel, respectively. In 1998, he returned to his fannish roots by editing an *Alter Ego* section of *The Comic Book Artist* magazine. He lives in rural South Carolina on a 42-acre estate with his wife Dann and a menagerie of birds and beasts.

For thirty-five years, Jerry Bails has been working on his *Who's Who In American Comic Books*, an index to all the creators from the Golden Age forward, which is available on disk. He retired from his teaching post at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and finds himself busier than ever working on continual updates to the *Who's Who*, as well as participating in the ongoing discussions on the Internet-based Grand Comics Database.

Comic fandom did its job well. The contemporary collector now has an incredible wealth of products, services, resources and events to enhance his enjoyment of the medium. While the medium has suffered a downturn in the wake of a speculation boom in 1993, and its future is unclear, it seems certain that comic books—in one form or another—will be with us for a long time to come.

What of that quest for respectability that motivated Jerry Bails, Richard Kyle and others? Significant progress has been made in that regard, with

The Dark Knight Returns the probable watershed event. In many respects, we have reached a time when the appreciation of sequential art seems as normal a pursuit as watching videos or the local sports team.

If the quest for respectability has been achieved largely because of the money to be made in the comic book industry, that's still a reflection of the interest of adults who are willing to commit their discretionary income to the field of comic art. Although I've made some comments lamenting the absorption of fandom into the industry as a whole, it was probably inevitable.

No longer will creators like Joe Simon and Jack Kirby toil without proper recognition ... or the writing of an Otto Binder be ignored. Comic book creators now receive the recognition (and financial reward) which is their due. And as a result, the field is able to attract and retain top talents.

The Golden Age of comic fandom was a series of events and milestones, certainly—but it was more than that. It was an

experience that has left us a legacy of indelible memories.

The sight of the cover of a latest issue of your favorite fanzine, as it slid out of its manila envelope; the smell of a rare, old comic book as you opened your first artifact from the 1940s; the thrill of the first time you met a comics pro.

Comicdom back then was coins taped to letters ... fingers smudged purple from ditto masters ... the smell of spirit duplicator fluid ... poring over comics ads in *RB-CC* ... mailing off orders with four and five cent stamps.

Trips to the mailbox were a daily adventure. The mails brought wondrous gifts: comics, letters, original art.

The particular innocence of the Golden Age of comic fandom is gone forever, as is our own. There's no passage back to that simpler time. Except, perhaps, through the pages of the classic fanzines.

The purple printing may have faded. But if you hold them up to the light and look closely, you might be surprised by what you see.



Illustration by George Metzger
from *On The Drawing Board*

The End

FANDOM REUNION 1997

A SPECIAL REPORT DATELINE: CHICAGO '97 ... A SPECIAL REPORT

Attendees:

**JERRY BAILS
JEAN BAILS
ROBERT BEERBOHM
RAY BOTTORFF JR.
BOB BUTTS
JOHN CANFIELD
GARY CARLSON
DWIGHT DECKER
EDWARD DEGEORGE
MARK EDMUNDS
JIM ENGEL
GRASS GREEN
MARK HEIKE
BOB INGERSOLL
TONY ISABELLA
HOWARD KELTNER
REVA KELTNER
JAY LYNCH
RUSS MAHERAS
RON MASSENGILL
JERRY ORDWAY
JON PARK
JIM ROSSOW
JOE SARNO
BILL SCHELLY
JEFF SMITH
KEN TESAR
JOEL THINGVALL
DANN THOMAS
ROY THOMAS
MAGGIE THOMPSON
MIKE TIEFENBACHER
MIKE TUOHEY**

It began after I had attended the San Diego Comicon for several years in a row, and was looking for a change. Wouldn't it be nice, I thought, to try *another* of the major cons in 1997, and meet some fans who rarely make it to the California bash?

Then another thought occurred. Perhaps *this* was the year to act on previous suggestions for a reunion of old-time comics fans – many of them located in the Midwestern states.

At once I got in touch with Jim Rossow, Grass Green and Maggie Thompson. When I ascertained that they already planned to attend the Chicago Con in '97 (which had just been bought by the *Wizard* folks), and were enthusiastic about the possibility of a full-blown fandom reunion, I made up my mind to head to the Windy City for my summer comicon experience.

Within about two weeks, the plan was hatched. Jerry and Jean Bails could make it, and Roy and Dann Thomas also expressed interest. When long time Chicago fan Russ Maheras offered to find a restaurant for the proposed luncheon, the die was cast. It was already Spring when the hastily designed invitations (partly reproduced below) were sent out, both via the US mails and via the Internet.

Come one, come all to Fandom Reunion 1997!!

Soon the responses were coming in, and then the adrenaline got pumping. This was really going to happen!

Although the invitations went out to only forty likely attendees, everyone was encouraged to spread the word. It wasn't long before I began hearing from other folks, and their names were duly added to the confirmation list. (The restaurant—the Pine Grove near the comicon site—would need to know how many guests to expect.)

You are invited

To a special event especially for fans who were active in comicdom in the 1960's & 1970's...

FANDOM REUNION 1997

An informal, no-host lunch at an affordable restaurant
on the second day of the Chicago Comicon



Date: July 5th, 1997 Saturday
Time: 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Place: The Pine Grove restaurant
[see map enclosed]

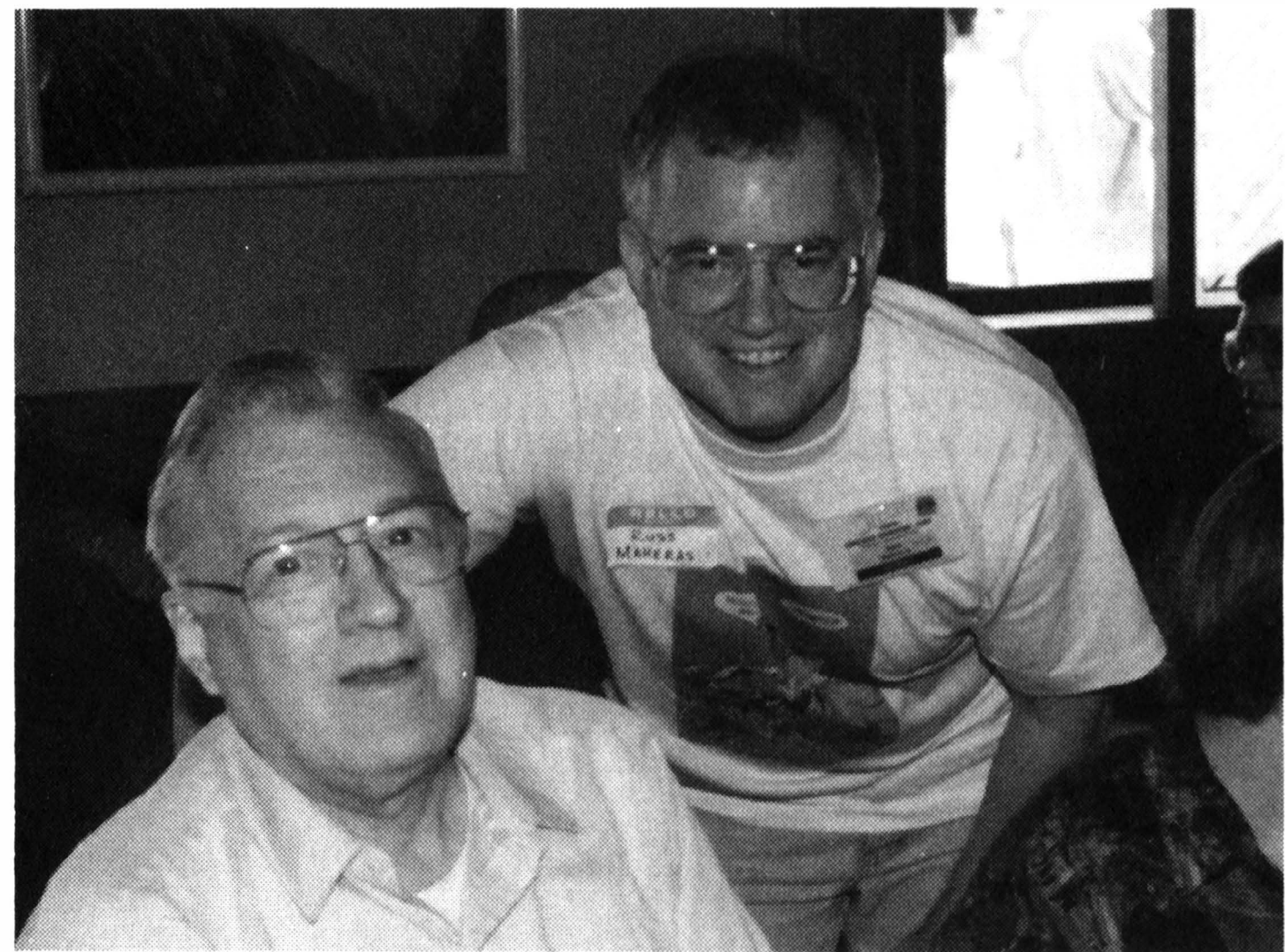


Who can attend? Anyone (and his/her spouse) who was involved in "The Golden Age of Comic Fandom" - and wants to get together just for fun! Some of the confirmed attendees are Joe Sarno, Bill Schelly, Jim Rossow, Jerry & Jean Bails and Russ Maheras. Other likely attendees are Jim Engel, Grass Green, Mike Tuohey, Larry Charet and Bob ("Keith") Greene.

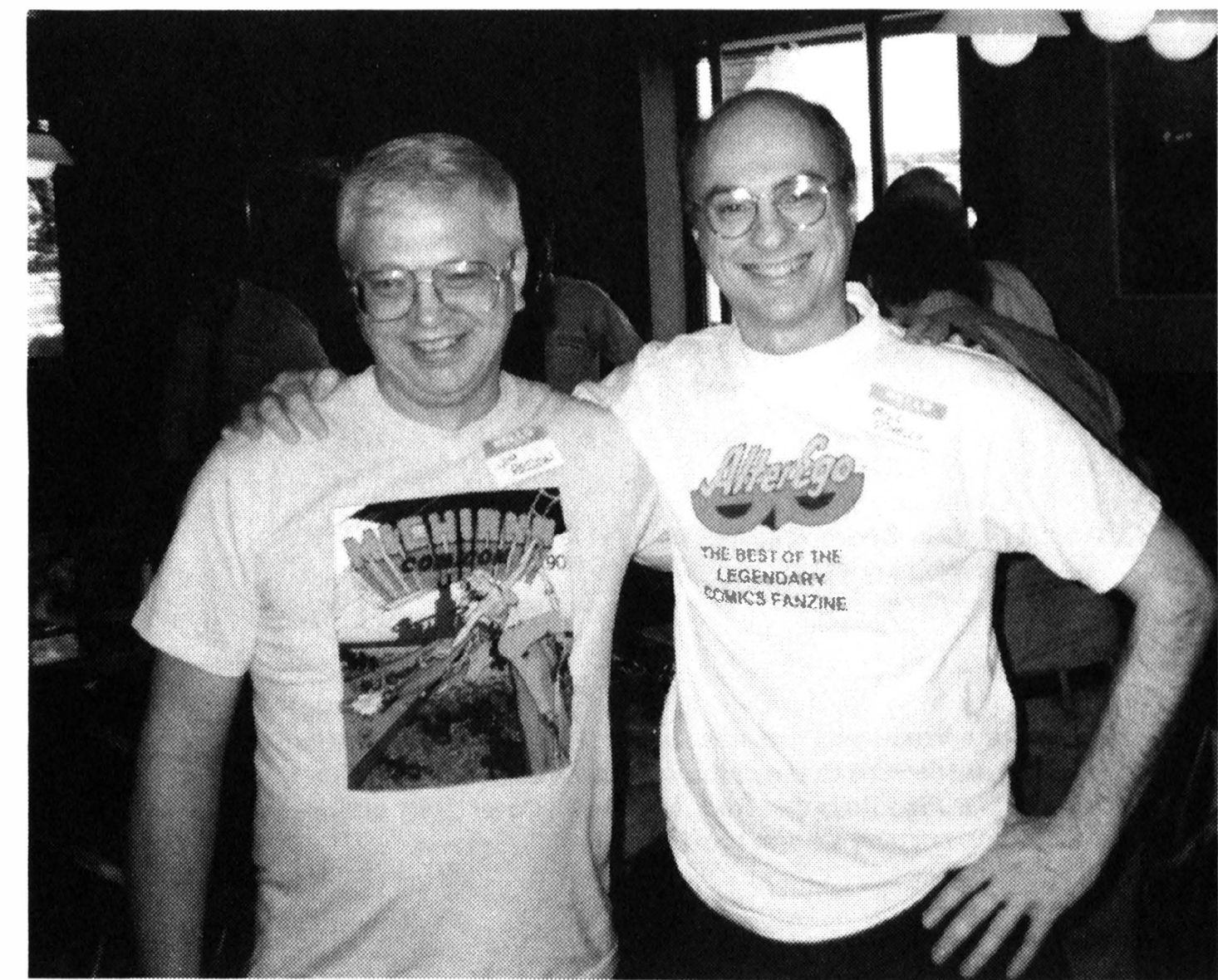


**1997 FANDOM
REUNION**

Above, left to right: Jerry Bails, Bob Beerbohm, Mark Edmunds, Roy Thomas, Bob Butts, Ron Massengill, Grass Green, Jerry Ordway, Mike Tuohey, Russ Maheras and a seated Howard Keltner, gather for Fandom Reunion 1997.



Jerry Bails and Russ Maheras



Jim Rossow and Yours Truly

Flash forward to July 5th. A convoy of cars converges on the Pine Grove restaurant, and soon the special banquet room is filling up. Among the first there, it is my privilege to snap photos of the guests as they mill about, renewing old acquaintances, and making new ones.

Even though many of the attendees have corresponded for as many as thirty-five years, some hadn't met until this luncheon. Howard Keltner, who had flown in with his wife Reva from Gainsville, Texas, had never met his long-time collaborator Grass Green in person—until the reunion. Nor had Howard met Jerry Bails or Maggie Thompson in the flesh before. It was with a great deal of pleasure that I watched these founders of comic fandom shake hands for the first time.

I noted with interest that there were six people there who had gathered at Jerry's house in 1964 for the Alley Tally Party: Jerry himself, Maggie, Grass, Mike Tuohey, Bob Butts and Jim Rossow. (Others, like Don Glut and Mike Vosburg, were invited, but couldn't make the trip from California to Chicago.)

Comics industry historian Bob Beerbohm was there, sharing some of his latest "finds" with Jerry and others. Ken "Kente" Tesar brought a box of vintage fanzines, which were eagerly perused by Bob Butts and Jim Rossow. Russ Maheras showed off his original Capt. Marvel t-shirt to Jerry (*Power of Shazam*) Ordway, who congratulated Russ on his rendition of the Big Red Cheese. Russ took many of the photographs that are printed here.

Chicago fandom was well-represented. Joe Sarno, comics retailer whose fannish roots go back into 1950s sf fandom, Ron Massengill, Jay Lynch and Jim Engel all mixed into the fray effortlessly.

And, in a sense, a "fray" it was—for the din in the banquet room was formidable. Even after fans found a

AM I
SENILE
YET?
JAY LYNCH



Roy and Dann Thomas



seat at the tables or one of the booths on the room's perimeter, and placed their orders, the conversation was full-tilt. Camera flashes were virtually non-stop. After all, when would there be such an opportunity again? It was the "second coming" of comicdom's Golden Age, and it was a glorious assemblage!

Some of the people there were folks who I often saw in San Diego, like fellow Capa-alphans Joel Thingvall, Tony Isabella and Bob Ingersoll. But it was good to see them again, as it gave me an opportunity to congratulate Tony and Bob on signing the deal to pen a Captain America novel (*Captain America: Liberty's Torch* hit the stands in November 1998) and to renew my friendship with Joel, who is co-owner of The Nostalgia Zone.

Jeff ("not the Bone guy") Smith picked a perfect moment to present a special color poster version of the cover of *Alter-Ego* #1 to Jerry and Roy. Jeff was there with his comic collecting buddies Jon Park and John Canfield, who spent quite a bit of time visiting with Jerry Ordway.

As with such events, it was over much too soon. The two hours flew by, but eventually it was time to head for the parking lot. Some last pictures were taken... some hands were shaken... last minute shuttle plans were made... and then it was over. But—no sadness, for this was a celebration. A celebration of one of the principal joys of comics fandom: fannish friendships! And that is something to feel unabashedly good about.

The End

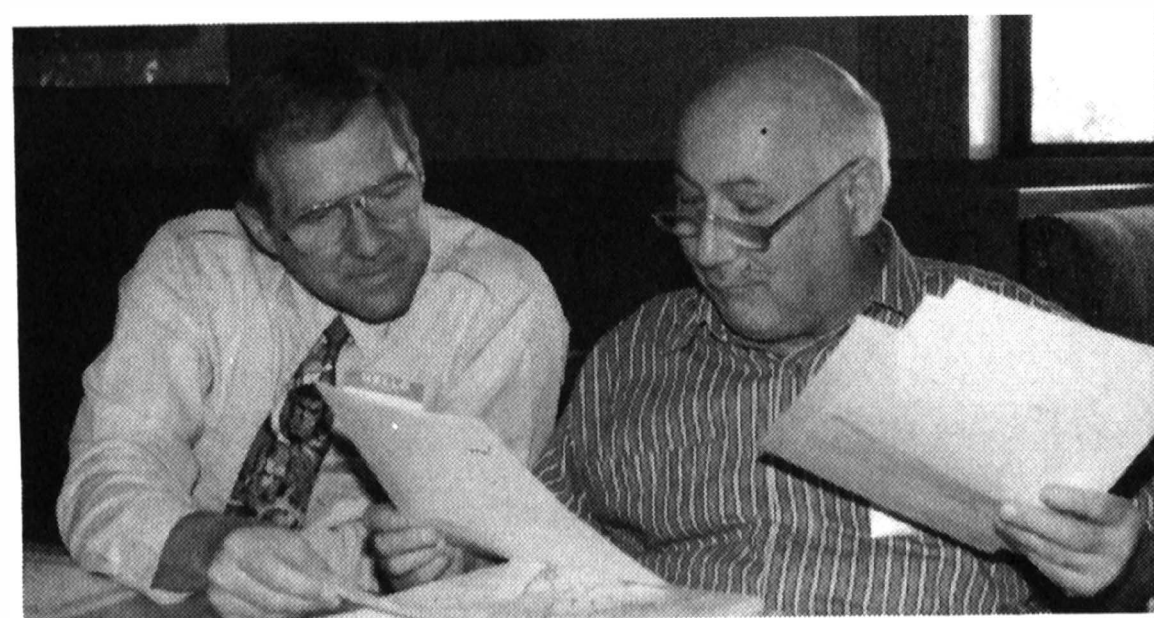
SUPERHERO
WAS HERE!!
Mike Today



Mike Tiefenbacher



Dann Thomas, Maggie Thompson and Grass Green



Ken Tesar and Joe Sarno look through a stack of vintage fan magazines.



Ed DeGeorge, Howard Keltner and Gary Carlson



Frank Miller's cover to Apa-Five #63

Author's Addendum to the Revised Edition

As I wrote in my addendum to the first edition of this book, *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom* evolved organically out of my own personal interest.

After spending over a decade away from the hobby entirely, I re-entered fandom in 1991 by joining the roster of *Capa-alpha*. I recognized many names on that roster, and began contributing art and articles to *K-a*. It wasn't long before I was collecting fanzines from the 1960s, ferreting out the addresses of fandom's founders, and conducting the initial interviews that led to a series of fanzines for a limited audience: *Ronn Foss Retrospective #1 and 2*, *The RB-CC Story*, *The 1963 Alley Tally Party Special*, and *Labors of Love #1 and 2*. Eventually, all these publications (which are no longer available) went into the manuscript that became *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom*—the first book-length history of comicdom. That book saw print in May 1995 as a "limited collector's edition" of 1,000 copies.

I was not quite prepared for the tremendous response garnered by *Golden Age*. I received scores of lengthy letters from people who not only expressed their satisfaction with the book itself, but wrote to relate their personal histories as participants in that halcyon era. Though the book quickly sold out, the letters and phone calls continued. Two things became evident: a second printing of *Golden Age* would be justified, and there were certain omissions in the first edition that ought to be rectified.

While publishing more books about comic fandom over the next three years, I gradually developed the concept for what has become the "Revised and Expanded" edition that you now hold in your hands. The plan encompassed the following considerations:

1) I had never been satisfied with the cover(s) of the first edition. When an initial effort became unusable, I asked graphic artist Nils Osmar to come up with something acceptable in a mere three days. While pleased with Nils' effort, it still wasn't the cover that I envisioned for the book. The new edition would

definitely have a new cover, and I am delighted with the piece that Michael T. Gilbert has created.

2) A number of errors that had crept into the first edition would need to be corrected.

3) Many new photographs and illustrations which had come into my possession *after* 1995 could be added to significantly improve the interior visuals.

4) Additional text material would highlight several of the most active "regional" hubs of fandom, and recognition would be given to many of the fans who were the movers and shakers in those regions.

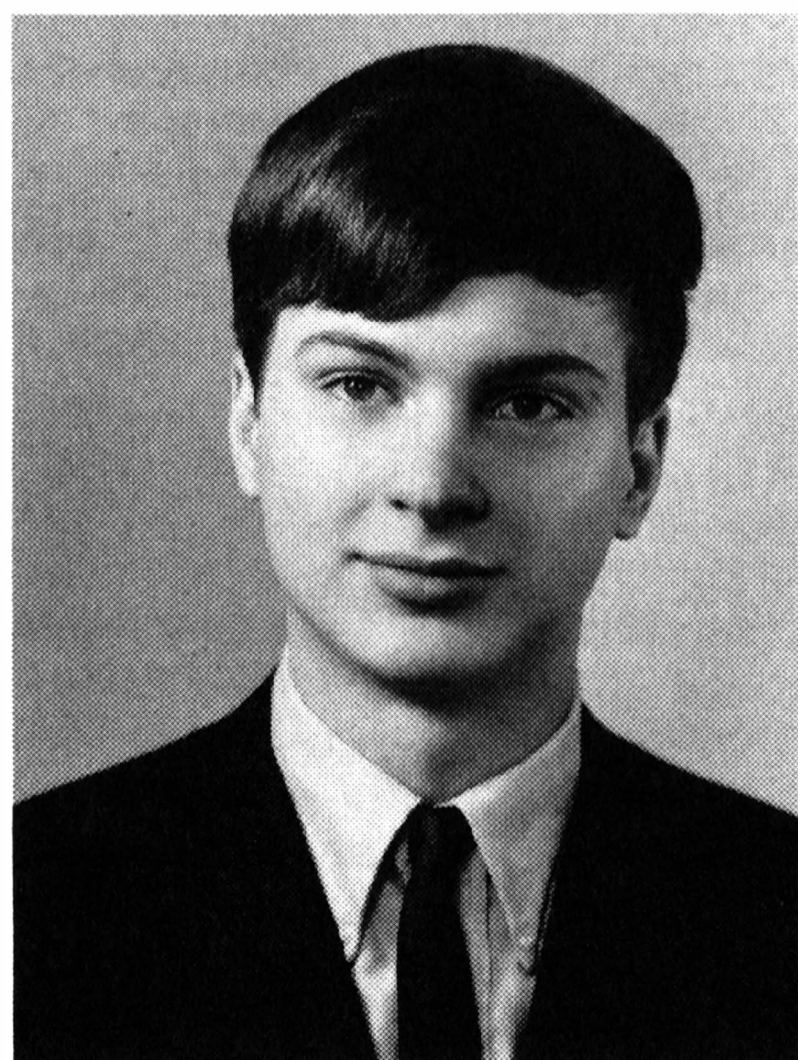
5) Naturally, adding material meant more pages, though I determined that the price should stay as reasonable as possible.

6) Finally, wouldn't it be nice if there could be some interior color in the book? After all, so many of the classic fanzine covers were striking works of art, and ought to be represented in color. At the special urging of Michael Gilbert, and with the help of colorist Kevin Horn, the Fanzine Cover Gallery that we came up with fulfilled this dream perfectly.

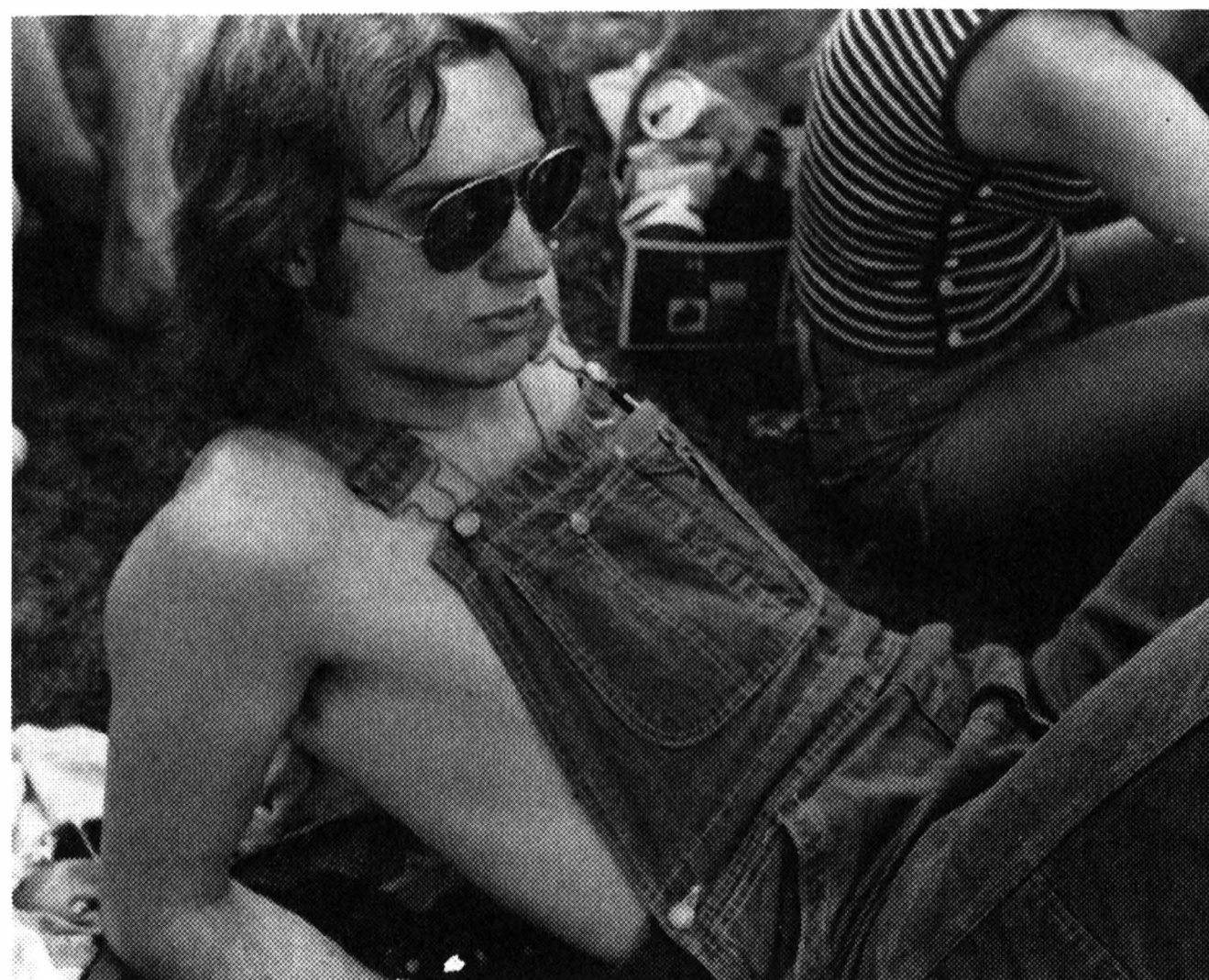
Still, I wouldn't want to claim that this revised version of *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom* is perfect, or all-inclusive. *Thousands* of fans were involved in the early days of comicdom, and it hasn't been possible to mention everyone by name who played a part. If you don't find your name in the index, or that your contributions were given short shrift, you have my sincere apologies.

I'm very indebted to the folks who contributed material to both editions. It has been a true labor of love for me, but then—so was comic fandom itself. I'll be most pleased to hear from anyone who would care to write to me, c/o Hamster Press.

Bill Schelly



Yours Truly in 1968



Photograph by Anita Hoyle-Dodson

...and in 1971, at a rock festival.

If you don't have *all three* of these acclaimed books celebrating the Golden Age of Comic Fandom -- *WAIT NO LONGER!!!*

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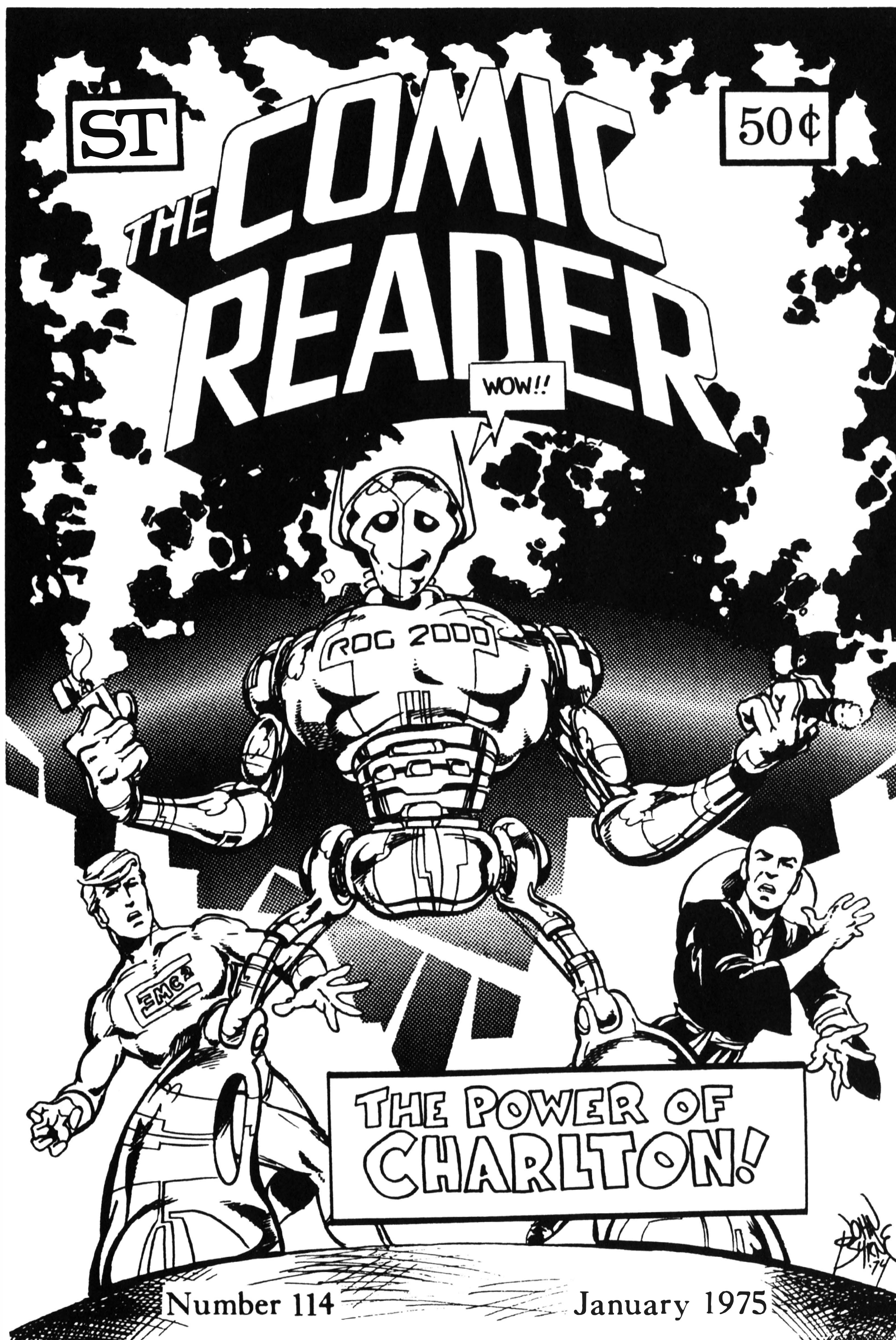
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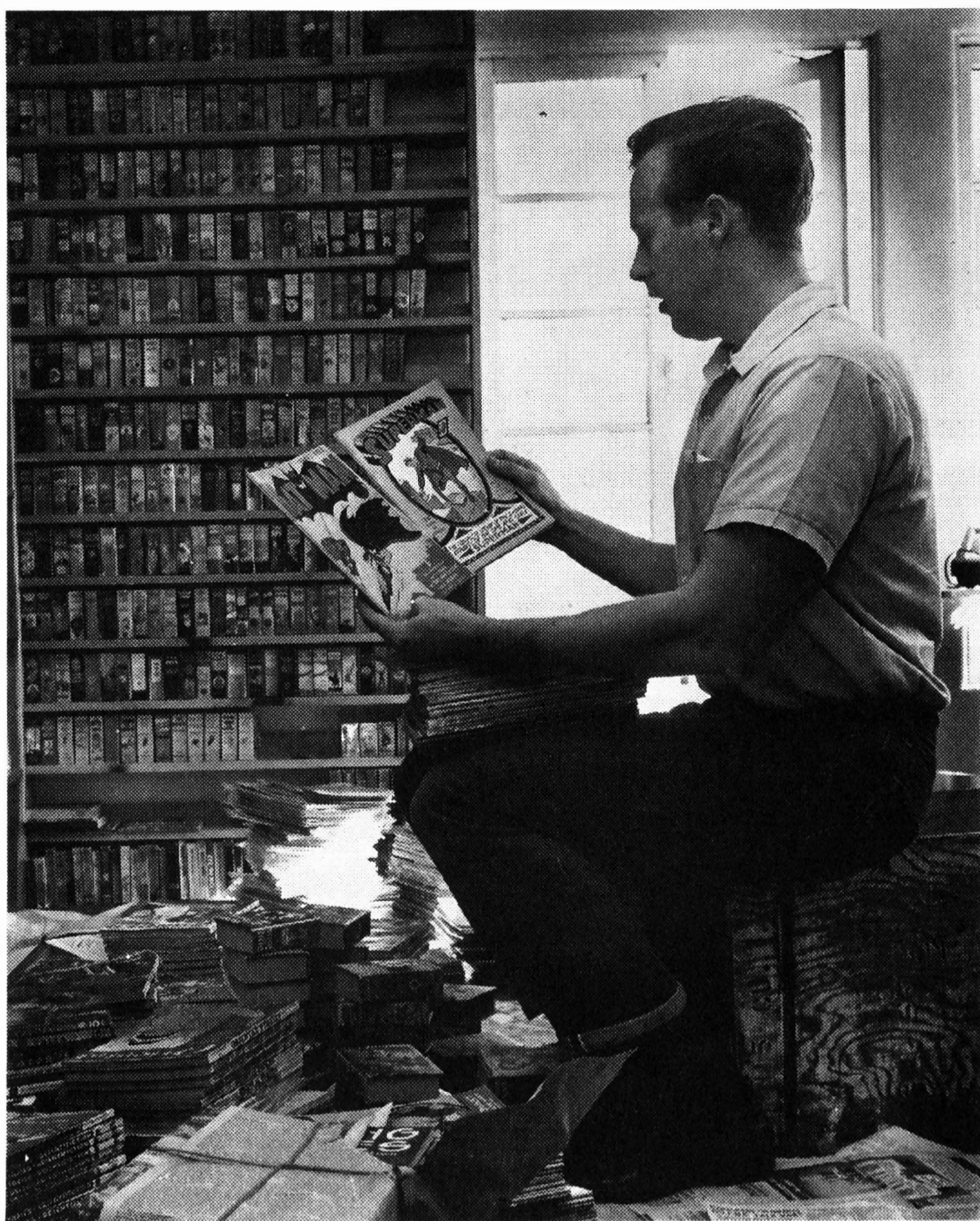
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*Leonard Brown in the upstairs of Collectors Book Store,
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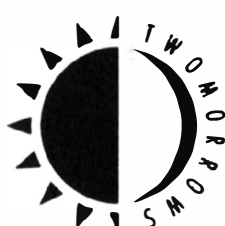
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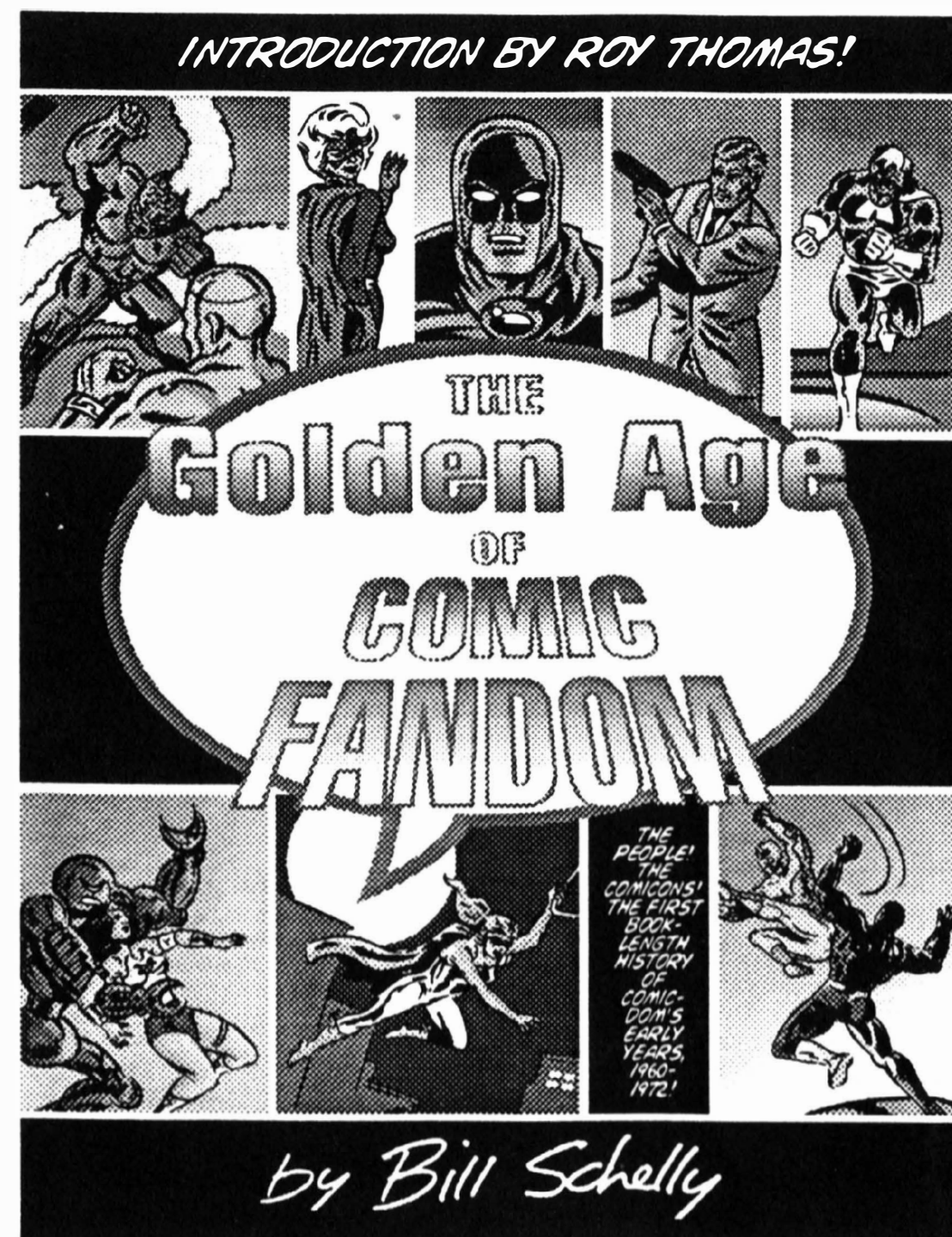


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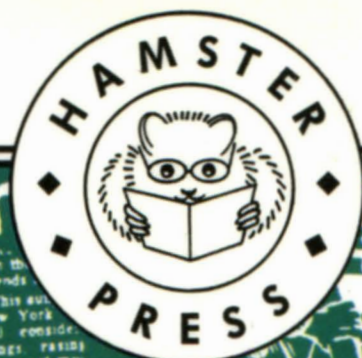
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